GEDDY LEE'S BIG BEAUTIFUL BOOK OF BASS

A COMPENDIUM OF THE RARE, ICONIC, AND WEIRD

GEDDY LEE'S BIG BEAUTIFUL BOOK OF BASS

BY

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Dedication

This book is dedicated with love to the amazing N.Y., without whose steadfast encouragement and extreme level of nerd tolerance it would not have been possible for me to go down, down, down the rabbit hole once again . . .

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Foreword by

Terry Foster

Leo Fender once said, "I don't believe that any electric guitar improves with age. I think that is a myth." Was he right?

Great collections transcend the objects contained within them: they tell stories, relay information, create meaning, and convey purpose. The extraordinary and beautiful industrial designs thoughtfully showcased in this book range from pristine, virtually untouched examples to those played passionately night after night.

Years after the golden age of electric guitar manufacturing, Leo couldn't comprehend the desirability of the early output of his and his contemporaries' factories. Throughout his life, he relentlessly pursued perfection through incremental improvement. This book is a testament to the insatiable drive of Mr. Fender and his peers.

In the early 1950s, the electrification and mass production of solid-body guitars and basses sparked a revolution. With amplification, bands became more efficient and mobile. Louder and smaller, guitars became an attention-

grabbing lead instrument capable of playing to ever-larger venues. Music changed forever. The most successful bands of every musical style toured locally and nationally, building the DNA of modern music. From honkytonks to hayrides, ballrooms to basements, garages to stadiums, high schools, and clubs, these stringed instruments evoked joy, passion, hysteria, angst, discord, and rebellion. The intimate relationship musicians forged with these tools helped write the soundtrack of the twentieth century.

Mr. Fender was wrong: electric guitars do get better with age. The presence of those who played them before us forever exists within these instruments. They are an extension of our collective musical identity and echoes of the past. Vintage guitar collections of this importance and magnitude rarely rest in the hands of a musician as accomplished as Geddy Lee. Geddy's collection represents every important popular musical genre, every tone in the bass palette, and is, quite simply, one of the finest of its kind in the world.

—Terry Foster
Co-author of *Fender: The Golden Age 1946–1970*

Backword by

Alex Lifeson

Rush R40 Tour, Austin, Texas, May 16, 2015 *(Randy Johnson)*

Geddy Lee is still my best friend. That says a lot about a relationship that has lasted more than half a century. We've shared many remarkable experiences in that time, both as bandmates and as buddies, but the thickest glue that bonds us has been our common love of music and musicianship . . . that, and all his great wine I helped him drink.

For forty-six years we wrote, recorded, and performed some of the most challenging music we could think of, and I'd often shake my head and smile at the crazy-cool bass parts Geddy would come up with. They were even better than the bass parts I thought I could write—mostly! They always seemed to be just the right combination of smarts and feel that allowed both

Neil and me to explore our own arrangements more freely, especially the amazing drum parts that I also wrote but, of course, never got used.

Now he's presented his collection of basses in such a thoughtful and elegant manner that, I must say, looking at the photographs makes me want to become a bass player. *Whew*, shake it off, Al, shake it off!

I've been on the other side of the stage while Geddy's played many of these bass guitars, and his passion and love for them were evident to me whenever I saw his huge grin. I know how hard he worked on this gorgeous book—I've hardly seen the guy for the past year, and I'm getting rather thirsty, but I know what it means to him to be the custodian of all those incredible instruments with their colorful histories. He didn't do this for the big bucks and chicks like I did; he did it because he loves those four-stringed wonders that have given him so much joy throughout his life . . . and mine.

—Alex Lifeson

Introduction

Falling Down the Rabbit Hole

Illustration by Daniel Richler

I suppose it was during the spring of 2012 that the notion of acquiring a vintage bass guitar first lodged in my mind. We had just started gearing up rehearsals for the Clockwork Angels Tour when I was approached by a music store with an offer of an instrument swap. They were looking for one of my stage-used basses to beef up their own “hall of fame” and tried to tempt me with a mid-1950s Fender Precision in return. At first blush, I wasn’t interested. I wasn’t a collector (of instruments, at least) and would certainly never, ever part with any of my main instruments—certainly not the 1973 Rickenbacker 4001 or my current Number One, the 1972 Fender Jazz.

Still, it sparked a series of discussions about vintage instruments with my trusted bass technician, John “Skully” McIntosh, during which I not only discovered how passionate and knowledgeable he was on the subject, but also how little *I* actually knew about the history of the instrument I’d been associated with for more than forty years.

So I started reading up on Leo Fender and the early years of the Fender electric bass. What a leap those instruments represented for the musical technology of the day, and what it must have meant to players back then to go from playing a stand-up all their lives to suddenly having a fretted

instrument in their hands. Then I investigated the history behind Rickenbacker, Gibson, Höfner, and on and on, getting deeper and deeper into the story of my main monkey business. The genealogy of these various brands had become, quite suddenly, fascinating to me. And as anyone with the collector's gene will tell you, "fascinating" can be a dangerous word. . . .

Allow me to take a moment here to explain something key to my personality. Once I turn my gaze to a thing with any degree of interest, I become curious, and feel compelled to research it. Curiosity turns into "fascination," which begets even deeper "engagement," and then, uh-oh, it's a full-blown *obsession*. And I'm, like, *Really*? *Again*?

This trait of mine started at an early age with a typically nerdy pursuit . . . wait for it . . . stamp collecting! (Glad I got *that* off my chest.) But then, and not a moment too soon, I discovered music and began to amass a mountain of vinyl. I started with the West Coast sounds of the Beach Boys and Jefferson Airplane, then turned to Brit rockers like the Yardbirds and the Who, and then the more obscure prog bands from the 1970s. (Van der Graaf Generator, anyone?) Lucky for me, I suppose, all that listening got me obsessed with figuring out songs—first on guitar and then the bass, spending countless hours in my room, jamming along with all those fabulous records until I could mimic my fave bass players.

The "collector's gene" didn't surface again until much later in life, when I was a touring musician with lots of idle time on my hands in the many different cities of the world I was lucky enough to see. I first became a devoted student of the game of baseball, watching the Cubs on WGN-TV every afternoon, as I groggily awoke around midday, after driving all night from the last gig. Then, having access to so many local museums and galleries in those cities, I got into photography, which led me to modern art and architecture, and eventually fine wine and food. I found myself spending my free afternoons (a working musician should *never* get up before noon) in each town's art institutions, and my evenings in the coolest local restaurants with the most interesting wine lists I could find. And if I had more than a few days off, I would scurry off to the nearest wine region—soaking it all up, so to speak. It was education by complete and total immersion in whatever had caught my "curiosity." As the great and wise pianist and raconteur Oscar Levant once said, "So little time . . . so little to do." Or something like that.

The Gibson Melody Maids of Kalamazoo, with mandobass, 1922

In the 1980s, my love of watching baseball turned into collecting baseball ephemera. For me, that was a way of learning about not just the history of the game but also the history of the US itself from a variety of social perspectives. Similarly, by the 1990s, my love of wine was taking my family and me all over Europe on our holidays, building a collection of juice while learning about the histories and cultures of the places it came from. And so, if these obsessions had become doorways for me to living histories and glorious pasts, I suppose it's not surprising that sooner or later I'd dive down the proverbial rabbit hole into the world of vintage bass guitars.

Skully and I first decided we would research a few of the classic basses played by those musicians I'd admired most as a teen; we'd put together a "modest" collection that represented my rumbly beginnings. But the more we looked, the more I learned, and the more I learned, the more I acquired. I started with Fenders, and in particular Jazz Basses, but eventually got hooked on instruments I had never played before. They were to me irresistibly intriguing.

I'd always been very focused on crafting a sound of my own, and I shied away from instruments I feared might lead me in the wrong direction. That single-minded approach certainly helped me create my own bass identity, but looking back now, I realize it may have also closed my ears and eyes a bit. Forty-plus years later, I'm beginning to understand the craft and the people

behind the various sounds and tones of basses that were always out there and available to me as both a player and now a collector, particularly those instruments manufactured in the years between 1950 and 1975. I feel like I owe it to my bass to do right by it. Silly, maybe, but collectors need all sorts of reasons to permit themselves the indulgence of collecting.

Anyway, as I was saying, Skully and I began to scour the globe. Gathering all the basses in one place has allowed me to examine the subtlest changes in their evolution—aesthetic, electronic, and ergonomic—and I've also been able to check out their fundamental *sound*. I've had a boatload of fun plugging them in and playing them all (and even road-testing more than two dozen of them), and doing so over and over, back to back, and side by side, has allowed me a rare opportunity to get a grip on the very essence of the bass guitar.

I began to ponder the origins of the thing. My generation's experience of the bass is as an instrument that enjoys equal rights. It could sit up-front, moving the song along melodically, like James Jamerson's part in "My Girl," or mesh with the drums to help create a rhythmic counterpoint, as Chris Squire does so emphatically in "Roundabout." But this is a somewhat contemporary point of view. What about the role of the bass back in the day? Well, historically, while there certainly have been concertos for the double bass, and the instrument did enjoy a period of popularity as a solo instrument in the 1700s (and the basses introduce the final theme in the fourth movement in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony), it's fair to say that bass has literally been second fiddle to the main event.

Paul Tutmarc with his Model 736 Bass (*center*), ca. 1937 *(Peter Blecha archives)*

As music evolved (or *de*volved, depending on your taste), so did the shape and the role of the bass, and plucking began to take precedence over bowing. According to Jim Roberts, the author of *How the Fender Bass Changed the World*, the great-granddad of the modern electric bass was the sixteenth-century bass lute. Big boys like the *theorbo* and the *chitarrone* sometimes had strings five feet long to produce superdeep notes. Evolving in parallel was the bass viol, of the violin family, which became the contrabass —although *it* was designed to be bowed. Then, in the early twentieth century, along came the mandolin orchestra boom (yes, that was a thing) and with it the fretted mandobass, made specifically for pluck-minded players and tuned to E-A-D-G like a double bass, setting the stage for the modern bass guitar.

The advent of electricity fired up both musicians and inventors. Oh, the possibilities! Telephone transmitters were being placed inside violins and banjos, carbon-button microphones were tinkered with, everyone wanted to get louder. Finally, in 1932, the Ro-Pat-In Corporation in Los Angeles began commercial production of the Rickenbacher Electro A-22, a.k.a. the Frying

Pan, the first stringed instrument with a pickup. But that was a *six*-string; if you were a bass player in a dance band, you must have stood at the back of the orchestra with your double bass, wondering, "When is it *my* turn?"

Over the next twenty years, there were stabs at louder bass design: Dobro, for instance, offered a bass version of its metal resonator; and the Electro-String Instrument Corporation (as Rickenbacker was then known) created the metal-body Electro Bass-Viol, which required its endpin to be plugged directly into the top of an amp. The earliest bona-fide solid-body electric bass—as we'd recognize one today, played horizontally and reliant on a pickup—was the Audiovox Model 736, designed by Seattle's Paul Tutmarc in 1936. He really should be popularly credited with conceiving the very first, but with World War II and other events getting in the way, it didn't happen for him.

So it was, in 1951, that Clarence Leonidas Fender—better known to us guitar nerds as Leo—introduced the Precision Bass, "freeing the bass from the doghouse," to use his own words. And *that* is sort of where I come in; or more precisely, where my collection does.

In the course of my various other pursuits, I've learned that the true collector's mind-set—and for the most part, one I share—is about condition, condition, and, oh yes, *condition*, but with guitarchaeology, the condition of an instrument tells me only half the story. Most collectors want only pristine, untouched, and unplayed instruments that have been under beds and in closets in suspended animation for decades; the cleaner they are, the more valuable they are to them. I get that, but what about the instruments that have lived a life?

What about the well-worn, smoky, sweat-soaked instruments that have played the bars, played the high schools, paid their dues at the weddings and the blues festivals, truly earning and showing their age spots, having not only made a living for their owners but also given their audiences pleasure? *Those* instruments have real effin' mojo to me. They don't necessarily have to have been owned by the famous, just by everyday working musicians—whether professionally or as weekend warriors, it doesn't matter; whoever it was who played because he or she loved to play, who wore the frets down to the fretboard and the paint down to the undercoat while doing so. Those are the instruments with stories to tell, not in so many words but in the way they look and the way they feel when I pick them up to play them myself. In this era of "relic'd" instruments—new but made to look artificially road worn—I feel it's important to find the *real* deal to give context to what that idea of playing

music really means. You can reproduce a look but not the life lived.

That being said, as usual I wanted it all: both the wall-hangers *and* the players, and a bunch that fall in between—but you can't play 250 all at once—at least, *I* can't—so why not share them with other bass geeks and collectors with the same affliction? To quote Steven Wright, "You can't have everything. . . . Where would you put it?" The answer is, in this book.

"You see, you spend a good piece of your life gripping a bass guitar, and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time."
(with apologies to Jim Bouton,* Ball Four*)

The title notwithstanding, I haven't done it all alone. From the outset, I knew I'd need a damn fine photographer with enough experience and creativity to snap hundreds of basses and keep them interesting, a far more difficult task than you might imagine. Instruments often have contours, angles, and features that defy easy translation to the page; their beauty lies in both the macro and the micro, and above all their colors are hellishly difficult to capture accurately—especially when you have a world of guitar geeks (starting with myself) to please, who are *extremely* particular about such details. I'm sure you will agree that Richard Sibbald has made these bass guitars look as lush and varied as the tones that they produce.

Along this journey of discovery, I also realized there were instances in which my or Skully's knowledge was wanting, so I also leaned on several discerning and experienced collectors, players, and guitar builders to make sure we didn't miss the key historical facts, the juiciest details, and the most esoteric minutiae. For the generous contributions of their time, scholarship, and good humor, I will be forever grateful.

Thirdly, wrangling words is not quite as easy for me as wrestling with notes. Fortunately, I just happen to be good friends with a guy who not only plays guitar and knows a hell of a lot about music, but who also encouraged me from the beginning to dive into the project. That person is my longtime pal, the author and journalist Daniel Richler, who's dedicated himself throughout this project to keeping me clear and focused and very *me* on the page (without using too many f-bombs).

I know that when one gets truly engaged in a subject, it's hard to resist the tendency to go on a bit. So I've tried as best as I can not to be obnoxious with obscure bits of information. (*Fail!*) Reference books and the internet abound with that kind of detail, both right and wrong, and I've tried to keep it to a minimum—but sometimes it's irresistible. Out of consideration for the rest of the population, we've created sidebars and various notes (or, as I like to call them, "nerd bubbles") that contain all manner of technical and historical data, so that those of you who somehow feel content to live your lives without such extra information may feel free to ignore any or all of them and get down to looking at the basses.

Finally, you'll see that there are interviews, comments, and quotes from my fellow bassfolk spread throughout this book. I have to say, I had such a blast visiting, grooving, and corresponding with them; I truly did not anticipate how rich and revealing their stories would be. Some share the same madness for collecting, some have collections that contain one-of-a-kind historic instruments, but all of them share the same love of playing the bass that I possess. But more contextually, these conversations shed light on the world of rock I've been fortunate enough to play a part in. Apologies if your fave bassist is not featured here as I would have loved to talk to even more, but I simply ran out of time and pages.

I hope you enjoy the trip.

—GL

1

Fender

BASS
COMPLETE COURSE
ADVANCED
BASS
Fender
PRECISION AND
JAZZ BASS

When I was a boy, the radio was always on in my mother's variety store. In those days, it was pure top forty: all the hits, all the time! It's there I had my first exposure to the Beach Boys, Booker T. & the MGs, Stevie Wonder, the Supremes, and Aretha Franklin, to name a few. I didn't know it at the time, but I was subconsciously absorbing the glories of Fender, in particular the Precision Bass in the hands of Brian Wilson, Duck Dunn, and James Jamerson. My interest in music was sparking, and soon enough I'd be poring over album covers and rock magazines, identifying the guitars in the hands of

those stars.

Fast-forward a couple of years: now a bassist with ambitions, ready to ditch my cheapie bass and standing in a shop, about to buy a 1968 Fender Precision. The salesman assured me it was a real “workhorse”—and I knew straightaway that was something I planned to exploit. I surely did play that thing, day and night. It was never far from my sight. I even loved the smell of it! And so began my long, if interrupted, history with the brand.

James Jamerson *(AF Archive/Alamy)*

Fender has always been there in my life, not always up-front but as a kind of benchmark by which all other basses are judged. I had some steamy affairs with other brands such as Rickenbacker, Steinberger, and Wal, but something

about Fender would eventually draw me back. I learned so many fundamentals with that ’68 Precision, and while there’s no denying Rickenbacker’s influence along the way, since the mid-1990s my more modern sound has been based on my Fender Jazz of 1972.

Of course, playing an instrument is one thing; knowing its genealogy is quite another. If ever I had a question that even Skully couldn’t answer, we sought out Terry Foster, the co-author of *Fender: The Golden Age 1946–1970*, who probably knows more about Fender than anyone else on the planet, and whose collection of Fender memorabilia squirreled away in his Toronto home is mind-blowing. His insights (as with those of other specialists in other chapters) have been a great help to me in my mad quest and are sprinkled throughout the upcoming pages.

Donald “Duck” Dunn and Booker T. & the MGs recording in London with Carla Thomas, 1967 *(Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy)*

The Beach Boys, with Brian Wilson and his P-Bass, performing “I Get Around” on *The Ed Sullivan Show (Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images)*

Fender

Precision Bass

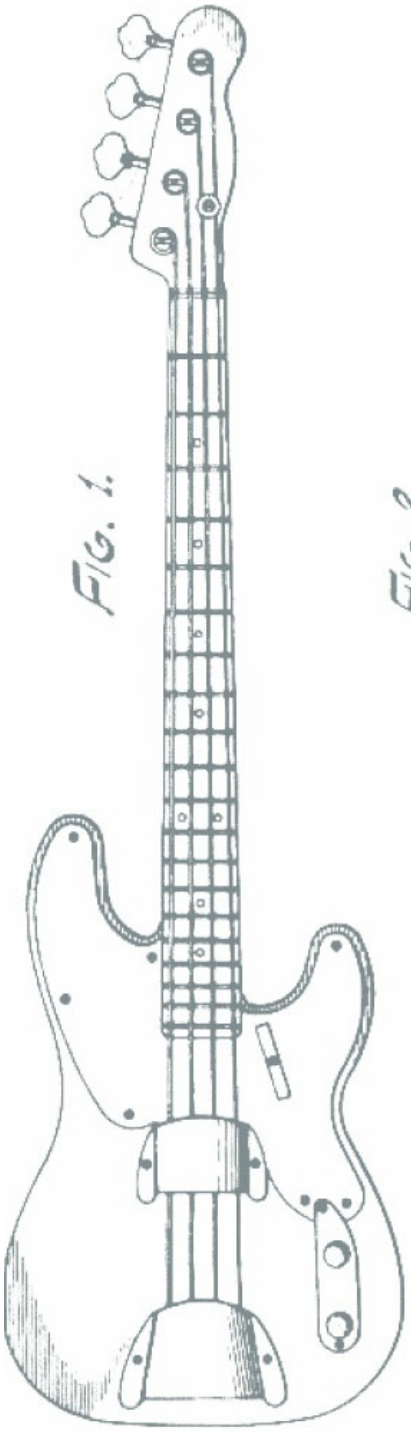


FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

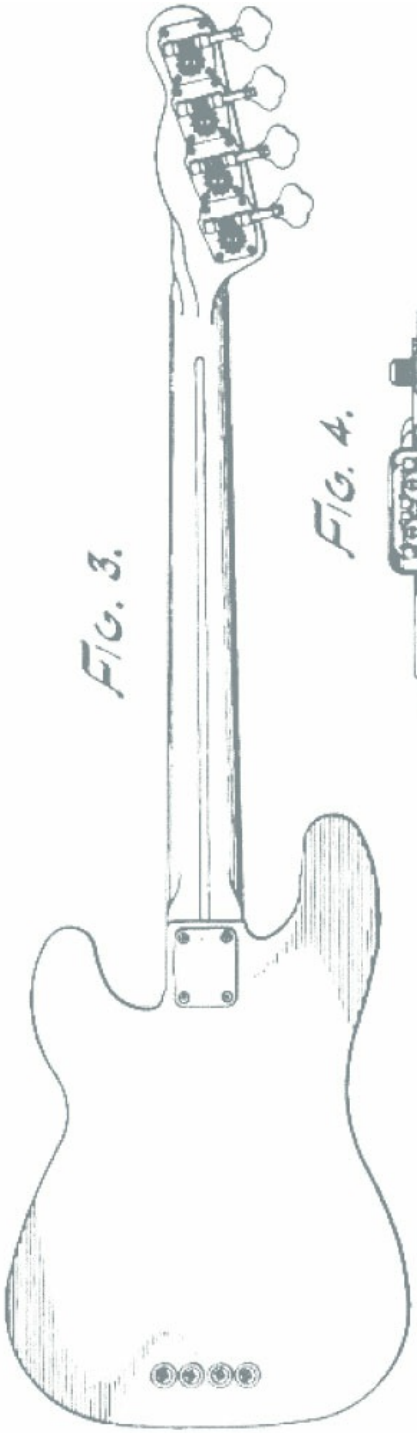


FIG. 3.

FIG. 4.

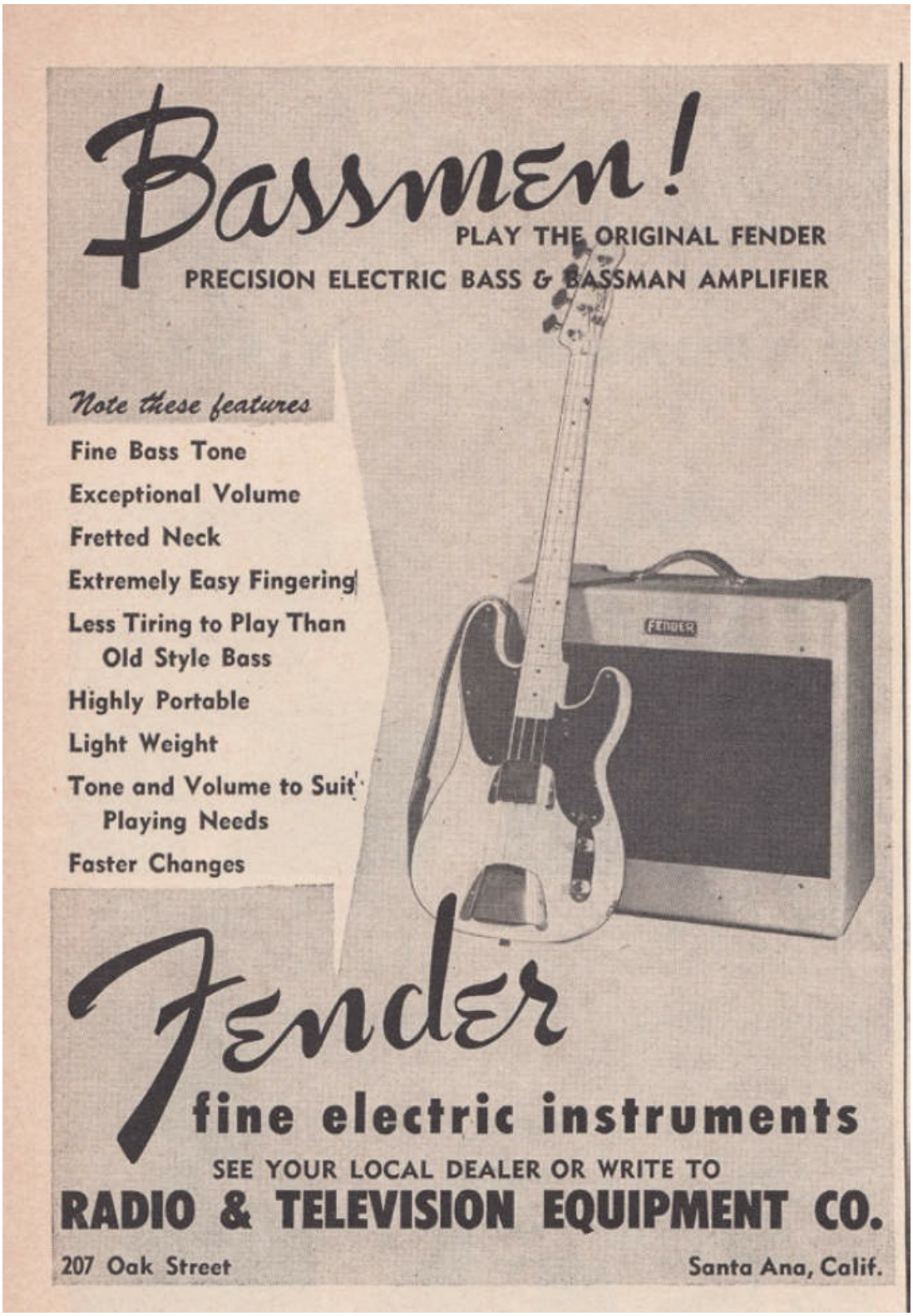
INVENTOR.
CLARENCE L. FENDER
BY Lyon & Lyon
ATTORNEYS

Precision Bass patent drawing, 1952 *(courtesy of Terry Foster)*

I can still remember the feel of the wide neck and the rumble of the furniture (and everything else, for that matter) in my teenage bedroom. When I first plugged in that brand-new ’68 P-Bass and turned it up loud, it was such an awesome, visceral moment that I didn’t stop to think about its origins. I didn’t care then, but I certainly do now.

Leo Fender’s concept for the instrument was that anyone who could play a guitar could now play the bass. He and his partner Don Randall named it the “Precision” because with frets you got the notes you wanted, and in tune. Everything that Leo did, in fact, was geared for utility, because first and foremost the man was an inventor and a gadgeteer. Rather than hire luthiers and seasoned craftsmen, such as those who worked over at Gibson, he mostly employed factory workers. Fender in the early 1960s was a classic example of the all-American assembly line.

After the Precision’s introduction in 1951, Leo kept tinkering with his invention and making a ton of improvements over a ten-year period. I’ve been fascinated to learn how that flat, stretched-out slab of wood morphed into a more streamlined, curvaceous, and utterly reliable, not to mention terrific-*sounding*, bass guitar that became the standard for so many musicians of all stripes. Assembling this collection has reignited my love of the instrument—playing them live on the R40 Tour, even more so. But enough talk. Let’s take a look!



Bassmen ad, 1952 *(courtesy of Terry Foster)*

1952

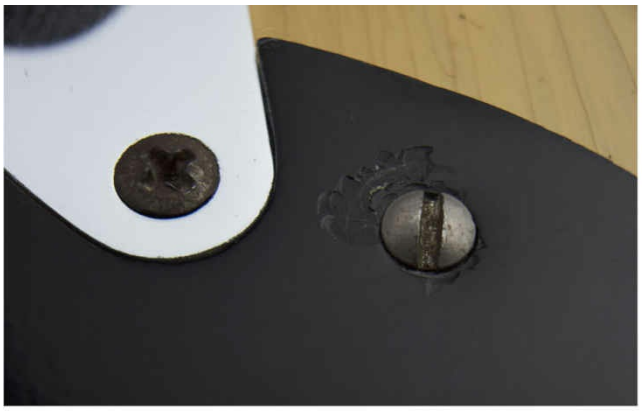
Fender Precision Bass

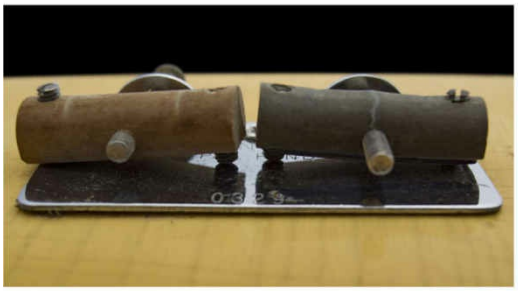
BLONDE

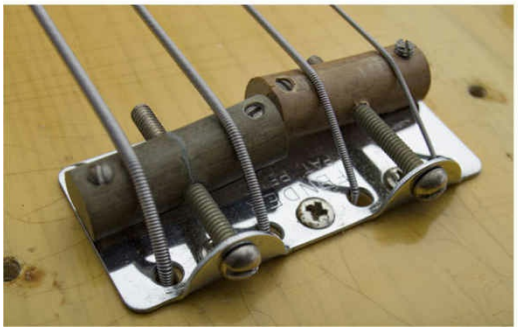
Bassmen! The electric bass arrives! It may not have been the *very* first, but it certainly was the first mass-production model. The Fender Precision was born in late 1951; this particular, pristine example dates to July 1952. One look, and you can see why it's called a "slab": a noncontoured ash body with a Blonde nitro finish and a one-piece maple neck. The truss rod is loaded from the back, and the slot is filled with a walnut strip commonly referred to as the "skunk stripe."

Fender
PRECISION BASS

Mon dieu! Shock, horror! We dared to turn the screws on this all-original sixty-plus-year-old beauty, so you could see the details of the neck assembly. Here's a good look at the black fiber pickguard with its finish of lacquer that adds depth and shine, as well as the neck and body dates written in pencil by "TG"—Tadeo Gomez, one of Leo Fender's workers.







Bottom right: It got loud! Fender's first bass pickup was a single-coil, flat-pole design.
Bottom left: In these early days, the serial number appeared only on the bridge plate, where the strings pass through the body, anchored from the back. Phenolic saddles were used for the first few years. Over time, these have had a tendency to dry out and crack, like the darker one of this pair, which has been repaired.

1953

Fender Precision Bass

BLONDE

This 1953 Fender Precision Bass Blonde marks the beginning of my madness: it was my first 1950s acquisition. Wine geeks like me look for

vintages from their birth year, so naturally I wanted the same in a bass. Now you know how effin’ old I am.

Originally designed for the Broadcaster and made in small batches, the early profile of the tone and volume knobs subtly changed over the years: the ’52 and ’53 both had slightly rounder domes, were flatter on top by 1955, and continued morphing until 1957, when

they achieved the flattop shape they still have today. Regardless, they've proved indestructible.

NO TRUSS ROD? NO BASS!

In late 1949, Leo Fender's partner Don Randall returned from the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) trade show, where he'd exhibited Fender's new Broadcaster (later called the Telecaster, due to copyright issues) guitar. Everyone had laughed at the "plank and canoe paddle," but Don's most urgent concern was getting a truss rod in the thing. Leo was famously frugal and didn't think it was needed. He thought of his instruments as modular consumables: when your frets wear out, just bolt on a new neck. A truss rod would take time and finesse to install. But in the end, Leo found a clever way to do it without having to create a more expensive two-piece neck. The important point, Terry Foster argues, is that without that truss rod, Leo *would never have been able to make a bass*—not with that scale of neck, a neck that could withstand the tension of its strings. The next most urgent issue was, where do you even *get* strings for an electric bass? Leo's solution? Use piano strings.

EVERLAST

A pair of ’53s: the P-Bass *(left)* and the Telecaster *(right)*

1955

From 1951 to 1960, the Precision Bass was in a state of almost continuous transition, as Leo sought to perfect his bass. The first significant change came in 1954, when the shape of the instrument began to move away from the slab to the more comfortable Strat-like contoured body, as the P-Bass began to resemble that of the bass we know today.

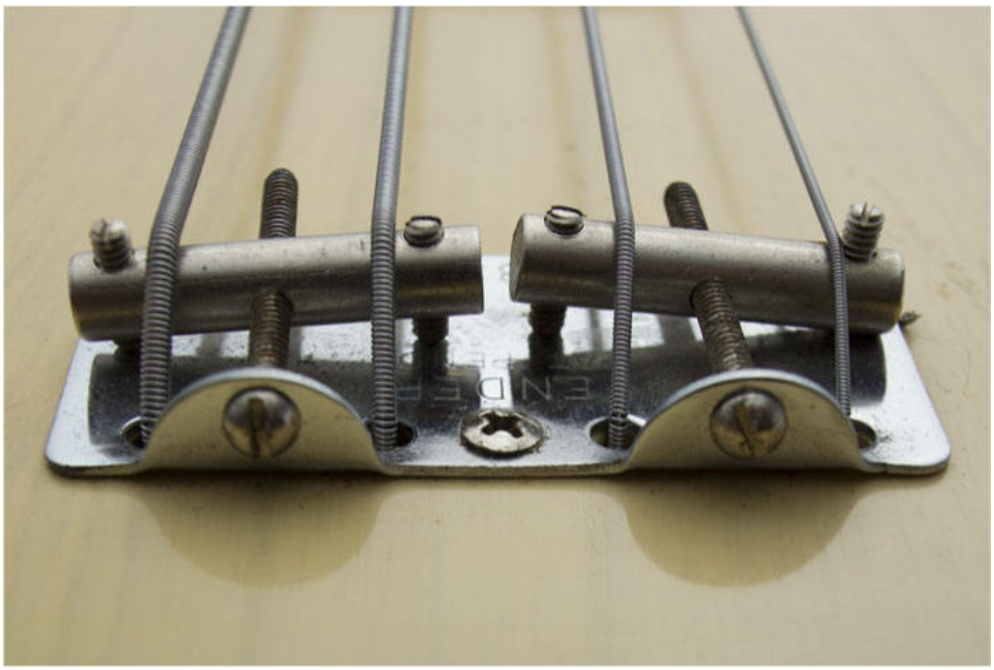
Left to right: The Precision Bass's first transition period: early '55 Blonde, '55 Sunburst, later '55 Blonde

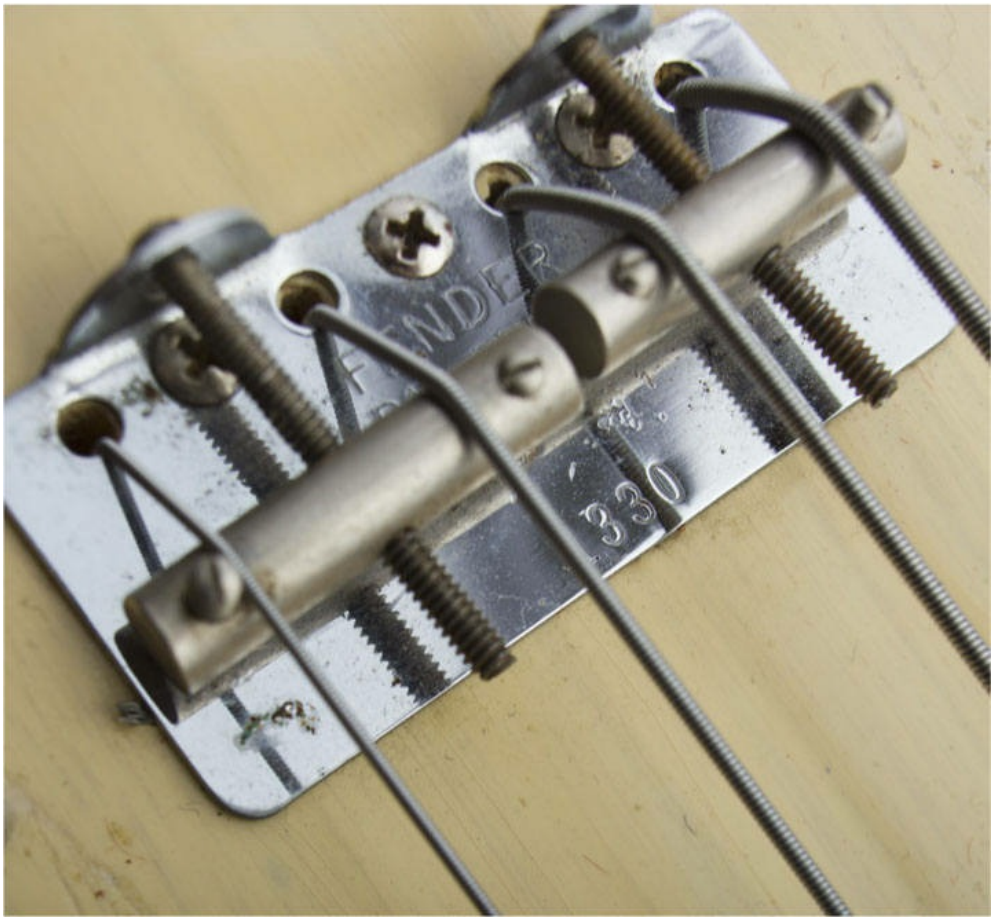
1955

Fender Precision Basses

BLONDE

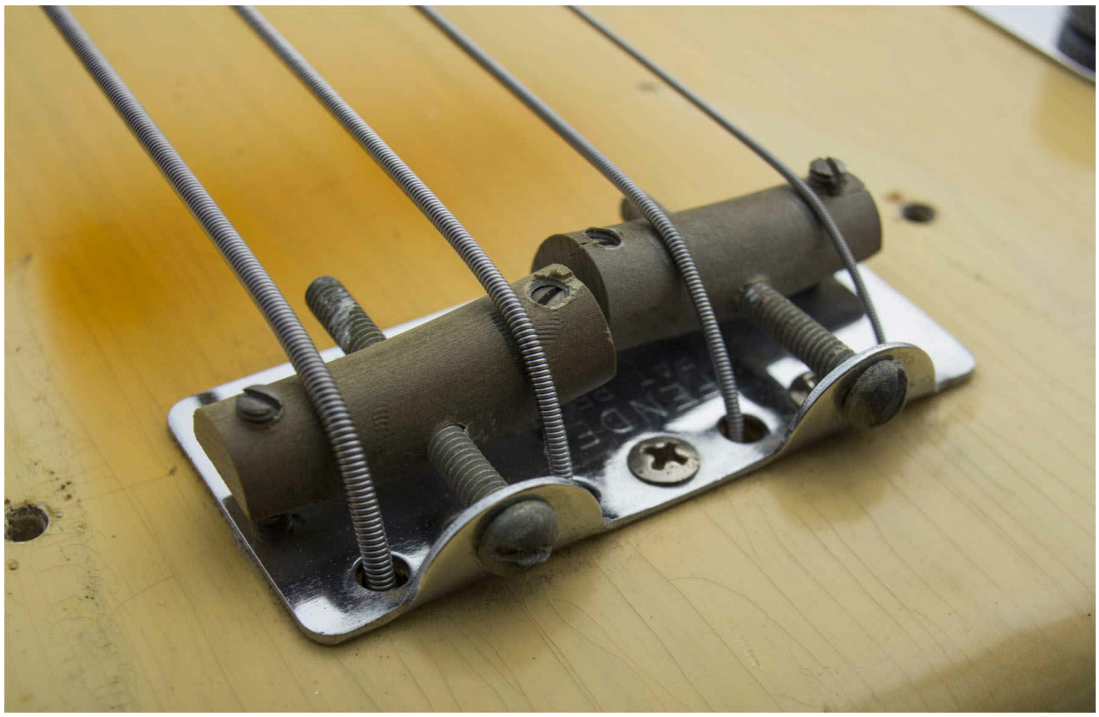
Changes afoot. As of 1954, steel saddles were replacing phenolic. The serial number is still visible on this bridge plate, yet that same year the placement of the serial number was transitioning to the neck plate. Some basses exist with the serial number in both locations.





An example of a later bass with the earlier phenolic saddles.
Nothing goes to waste in a guitar factory.

Fender typically used “swamp ash” for these see-through Blondes, as opposed to alder for the Sunbursts. It took much more work to prep ash because of its porous nature—it had to be filled in with a shellac sanding sealer—but the beauty of the result is self-evident.



Out of curiosity, I played both of these Blonde ’55s back to back for quite a while to see if I could discern a noticeable difference attributable to the phenolic saddles as opposed to the steel. It must be said, the results are inconclusive, as no two pickups are identical. However, the bass with steel saddles was a little brighter and had more sustain.

1955

Fender Precision Bass

SUNBURST

In 1955, the transition continued with the introduction of the new two-tone Sunburst finish. This one is made of alder, and has a gleaming white plastic pickguard.

'55 P BASS

The serial number, no longer visible on the bridge, fully transitioned to the neck plate in 1955.

These black staggered pickup poles were introduced in 1954, in an attempt to balance the output of each string.

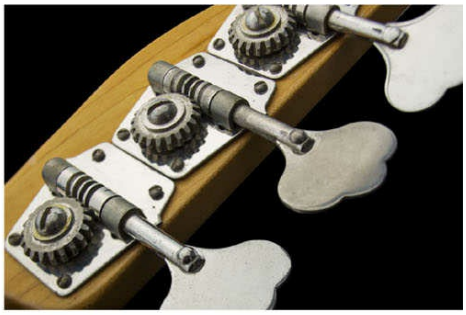
Sting famously favors P-Basses from this period, seen here c.1994
(Jim Steele/Popperfoto)

1956

Fender Precision Bass

BLONDE

From a year that mostly saw Sunbursts being produced came this well-loved bass with the rare combination of Blonde finish and an original white guard.



1958

Fender Precision Bass

TWO-TONE SUNBURST

New! New! New! As of 1957, the P-Bass design was coming ever closer to the instrument we recognize today. This early ’58 *(below, left)* shows what’s happening: pickup, bridge, knobs, headstock shape, covers—all-new designs—plus my personal favorite, the super cool, gold anodized aluminum

pickguard, which remained through 1959.

Left to right: ’58 two-tone Sunburst, Blonde, three-tone Sunburst

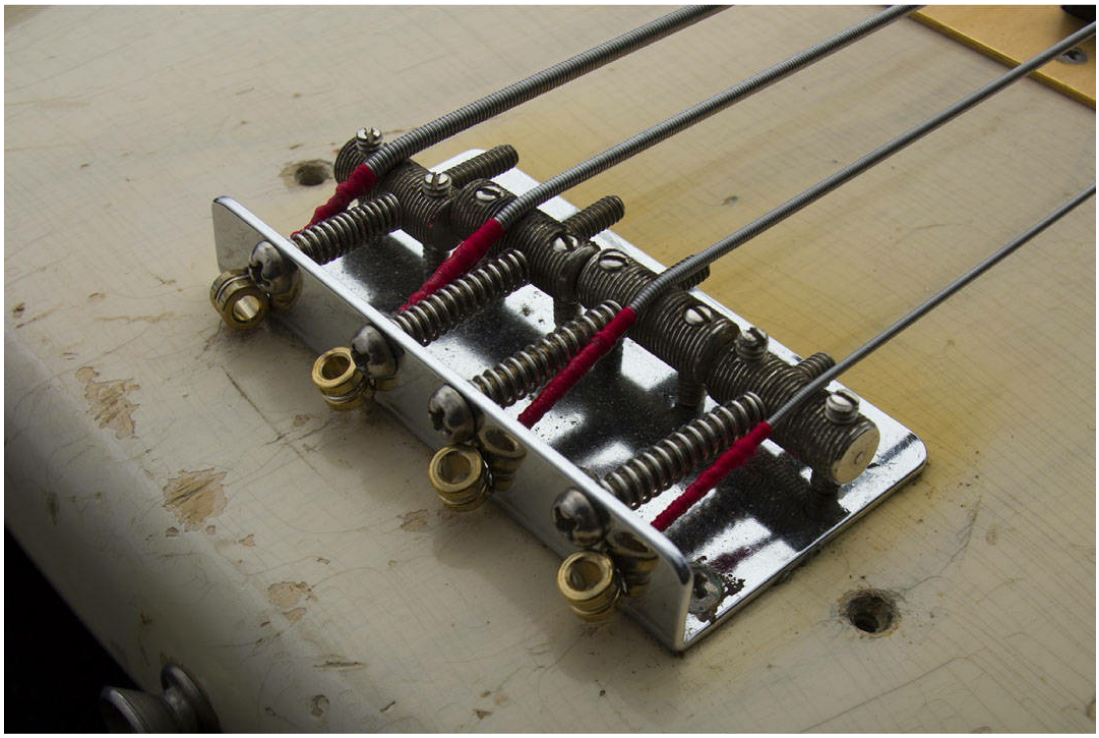
Left: This is the only Precision I have from the 1950s that has a pronounced V-shaped neck. Apparently Fender played around with these between early 1957 and mid-1958. Neck shape is down to a player's personal preference. This "strong" pointy V feels somewhat chunky in my hands, and though that's not my usual choice, when I discovered the bass in a shop in Tokyo I found myself joyfully playing it for more than an hour. ***Right:*** The newly redesigned split pickup wired to reject hum.

1958

Fender Precision Bass

BLONDE

See-through Blonde with an anodized guard is a pretty rare combination. Although this one’s been well played, to me it’s still—as collectors say—a super find.



The redesigned bridge now features individual fine-threaded saddles for each string, allowing for more accurate intonation adjustment. The strings no longer pass through the body. This bridge would be manufactured for only a short time before being modified yet again.

the
best
things
don't
always
need
big
packages
Proof . . . the popular Fender precision bass. It's the instrument with the revolutionary concept . . . designed to offer the highest level of bassmanship yet possible. Conveniently smaller in size and easier to play, this sensational instrument provides the tone range and musical quality suited to every type of instrumentation, combo to full orchestra. Bassmen agree its fast-action neck improves technique and inspires a whole new concept of bass playing.
Why not visit your leading music dealer and ask to hear this remarkable instrument yourself.
Fender
SALES INC.
308 E. 5th ST. • SANTA ANA, CALIF.
AY, 1958
3

TAKE A FENDER ANYWHERE

When big bands toured the land, the biggest pain was schlepping that big old bass around. Remember the 1990 TV drama *Elvis* about his early days on the road? There's Bill Black attaching his bass to the roof of the car, in all weather, because it doesn't fit in *any* car—even with the enormous automobile trunks of the 1950s and 1960s. So, whatever resistance there might have been among traditional musicians to the new instrument, one inarguable appeal of the Precision was its portability.

1958

Fender Precision Bass

THREE-TONE SUNBURST

The now-familiar three-tone Sunburst arrives.

1959

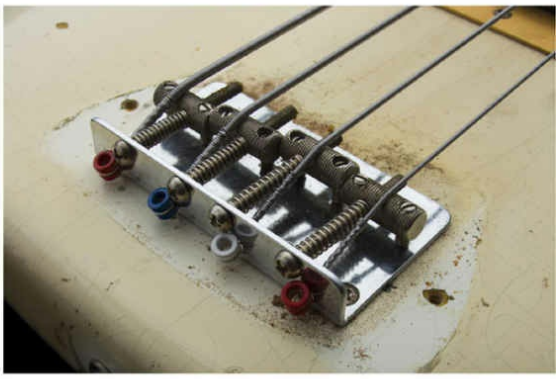
Fender Precision Bass

OLYMPIC WHITE

This is one of the jewels of my collection. As you can see, it's Olympic White with a matching headstock—almost unheard of on Precision Basses. It was made as part of a matching set for Jimmy Bryant, a.k.a. "the Fastest Guitar in the Country," and his bandmates. Although the history is mostly anecdotal aside from a few photographs, we do know that the set consisted of at least two Jazzmasters and this Precision Bass—when Bryant, along with Rue Barclay and Bill Choate, were playing in the New Sons of the Pioneers (as seen in the photograph below). Jimmy Bryant and the Night Jumpers

appear in the 1963 movie *The Skydivers*, in which you can check out Rue Barclay playing this very bass. Barclay owned and used it throughout most of his career, until he sold it to the vintage guitar dealer in LA from whom I purchased it.

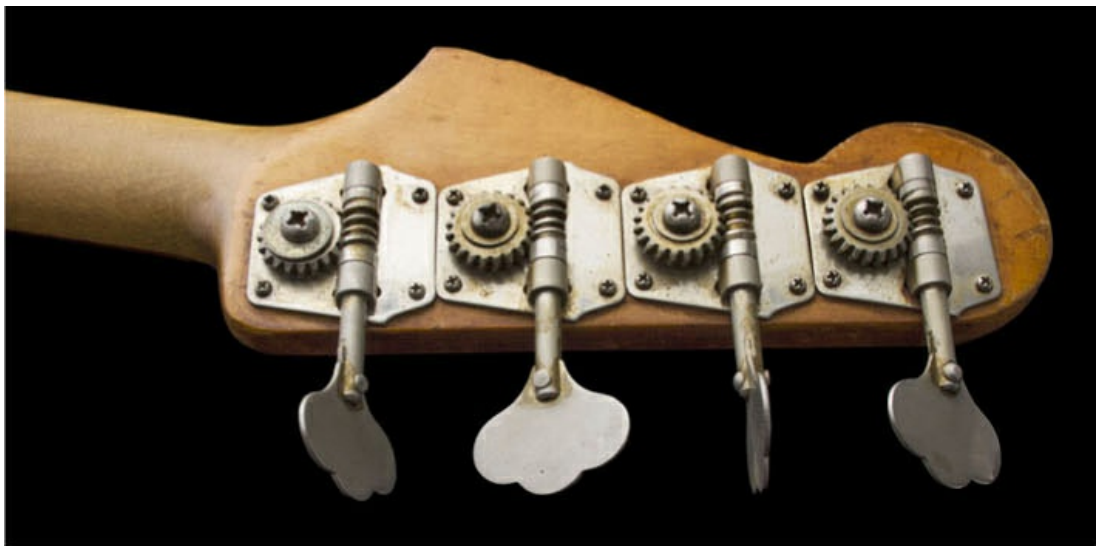
Physically, this bass has survived quite nicely, apart from a very strange burn mark on the bottom, and it's one of the best-sounding P-Basses that I own. In fact, when I used it on Rush's final tour, R40, it was a fave of fans, who consistently singled it out for its tone—which I would describe as having a strong, punchy bottom end and clear, taut top-end definition. Oh, and this is also the year they reintroduced flat pole pieces to the pickup.



1959

Fender Precision Bass

SUNBURST



In many ways, and certainly to a player as opposed to a collector, this is one of the most sought-after versions of the late 1950s Precision Basses. It boasts a rare combo: a gold guard and the newly introduced rosewood slab fingerboard. It makes me think of Donald “Duck” Dunn of Booker T and the MG’s; although he’s mostly identified with a ’58 maple neck P-Bass, serious fans know that his first Precision was a ’59 model with a slab board. As legend tells it, in 1967 Duck loaned that ’59 to the bass player in Otis Redding’s band, and it disappeared in the same crash that so tragically took the lives of Redding and most of his musicians.

Aside from the fact that this bass oozes visual mojo, it’s a real joy in my hands, with a classic P-Bass tone that reminds me of so many songs I grew up listening to without realizing it was Duck grooving on them. The first time I picked this bass up to test it out, I instinctively found myself playing Wilson Pickett’s “In the Midnight Hour” once again. (Yes, I played those songs in my basement band years!)

If “clay” dots were really made of clay, they’d dry up and fall out, so what were Fender fret dots really made of? One crazy story that feeds the legend of Leo’s thriftiness is that he repurposed old linoleum from the Fender factory floor. According to *The Stratocaster Chronicles* by Tom Wheeler, they were made from “a fiberboard, similar in composition and thickness to their pickup coil form-tops.” But I think I’m going to go with John Page, master builder at the Fender Custom Shop from 1987 to 1998, who’s said that it was most likely “a material called ‘Harvite,’ a fine-clay-impregnated phenolic resin that was also used in old poker chips and hotel key fobs. I guess it’s no longer manufactured, but go to the swap meets and look for old clay-colored poker chips . . . you can make dots out of them. Really!”

1960

Fender Precision Bass

BLACK

To the modern player Black is a common color, but in the late 1950s and early 1960s it was a pretty rare custom order. This particular bass, having spent much of its life in a case unplayed, is a minty collector’s prize. (As my

friend Colin says, “Johnny got a guitar for Christmas, but he wanted a drum kit.”)

1961

Fender Precision Bass

OLYMPIC WHITE

The Olympic White is equally pristine: an unusual example of an instrument that left the factory with no clear coat. With a lovely piece of flamed maple behind that rosewood fingerboard, and a sound that’s deep and true, it’s one of the top P-Basses in my collection.

It’s unusual to see a green guard on a P-Bass before late 1962 (we suspect Fender fitted them only on Black ones). So-called “green” guards began life as white, but aged to varying shades of grayish green due to environmental exposure. They were made of nitrocellulose—a highly flammable compound that, when used as an explosive, was originally known as guncotton. Nitro guards have a common tendency to shrink and crack, and, according to legend, also to catch fire. None of mine have . . . yet.

“G, F#, F♮” ? Dude, don’t write on the *bass*!

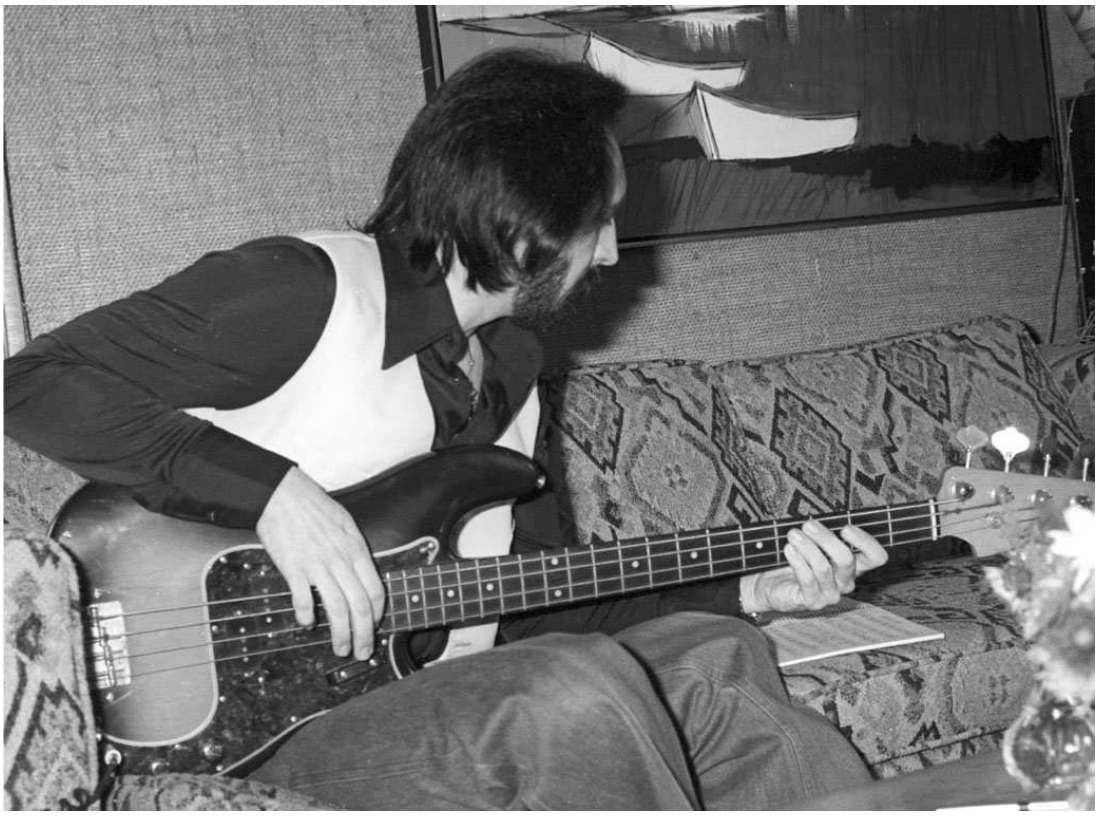
1961

Fender Precision Bass

SUNBURST

AAA

Look at this chair. Have you ever seen such a chair? Oh—on this chair rests a bass that has significant meaning for me. Pictured with one of his straps from Manny's in NYC, it belonged to John "The Ox" Entwistle of the Who, who was and remains a hugely influential player in my life. I was fortunate enough to acquire this P-Bass from my friend and long-time Who employee Alan Rogan (interviewed later in the book; see here), who describes how John was *always* playing, and used to sit around his house noodling on it. I am *never* changing the strings.



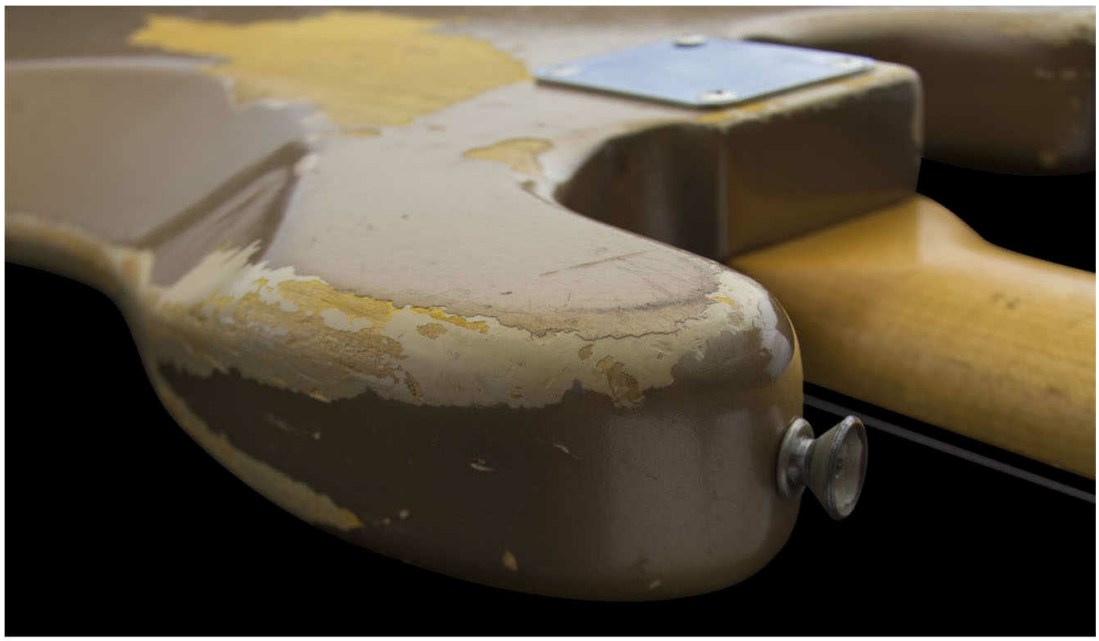
The man himself rehearsing in his hotel room in 1979 *(Michael Ochs)*

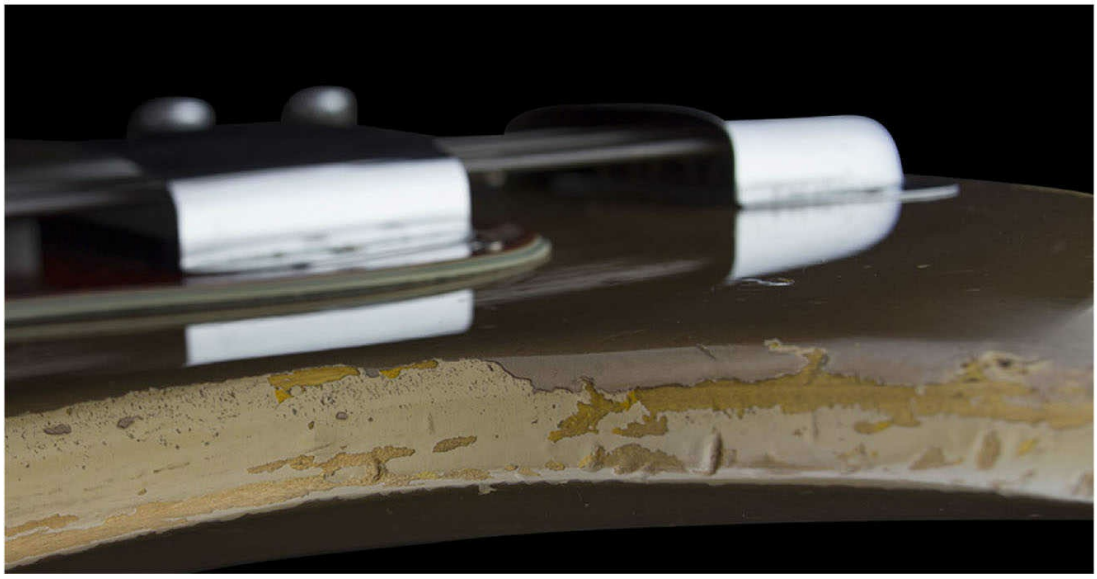
1962

Fender Precision Bass

SHORELINE GOLD

Above and below: Pre-CBS Shoreline Gold is hard, and thrilling, to find in *any* condition. Like a few other custom colors, this one varies slightly from instrument to instrument, partly due the yellowing clear coat, and partly to color formulas (see here). Shoreline Gold was introduced in 1959 and replaced in 1965 by Firemist Gold, a still cool but very different color.





1962

Fender Precision Bass

FIESTA RED

This bass traveled a long way to finally land in my hands. The dealer purchased it from the original owner in South Africa, and as you can see, it has lived a life. An honest relic.

The four-layer tortoise celluloid guard appears to still have been standard on early custom-color instruments prior to late 1962.

1963

Fender Precision Basses

FOAM GREEN

It’s Holy Grail time!

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

I love Foam Green basses, both because the color's so cool (visions of California and Chevy Bel Airs) and because they're really hard to find. It's the thrill of the chase, you know. One explanation for the color's scarcity is that it simply wasn't very popular in the pre-CBS years. As luck would have it, I found these two '63s within a few weeks of each other, and they couldn't be more different. The one on the left is clearly a cherished beauty queen. The other, well, it's been through the wars. Someone decided black was cooler and painted over the green. It's fortunate that he didn't do a more professional job, or the original color would have been lost forever. Luckily, someone else was able to remove the black paint. Traces remain, and the buffing has revealed some of the white undercoat, leaving it wounded but, in my view, wearing its history in an authentic and cool way.

As of 1963, the slab board has disappeared, replaced by a thin rosewood veneer.

“I love the simplicity of the Precision. Always sturdy and reliable. It does what it says on the tin!”

—STEVE HARRIS, IRON MAIDEN

1963

Fender Precision Bass

LAKE PLACID BLUE

This is the second of two basses that came to me from the renowned collection of veteran bassist Bob Daisley. It’s really nice to find Lake Placid Blue as it was intended to be seen: a deep, metallic *blue*.

1963

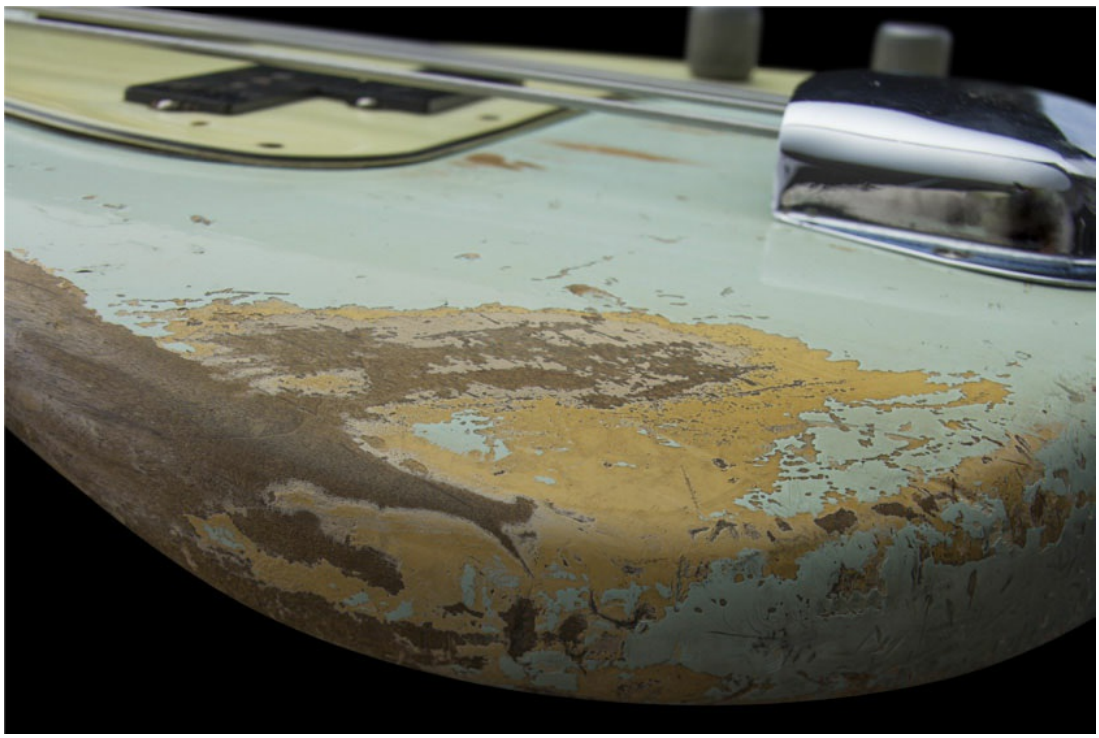
Fender Precision Bass

SONIC BLUE

Blood, sweat and tears—the opposite of a “case queen” is a “road warrior.” This bass has earned its title.

A COLLECTOR’S TALE

A few years ago, I found myself visiting friends in Japan, and, of course, while I was there I popped into some vintage guitar shops. I made a point of visiting one small place in Tokyo, where I knew there was a rare ’63 Sonic Blue P-Bass for sale. The dealer, a well-traveled guitarist who sold instruments as a sideline, turned out to be a very sweet man. He explained to me that thirty-five years ago he’d gone to a guitar show in California to buy a bass for his friend, and brought this one back for him. The fellow had played it ever since and, now seventy, had reluctantly decided it was time to retire and let the instrument go to someone else. I could tell the bass had personal resonance for this dealer, due to its history and his friendship with its owner, and that he was not so interested in making a dime on it himself as helping his buddy out. I found the story touching and, after playing the bass in his shop for twenty minutes (and a little good-natured haggling), I knew it was coming home with me. I really enjoyed my time in that little shop tucked away in Shibuya. It was especially nice to hang with a fellow musician from another culture, sharing stories of a mutual passion.



1963 & 1964

Fender Precision Basses

FIESTA RED

Left to right: ’63 and ’64 mintiness

The original owner called the ’63 here “coral pink,” but there is in fact no such color on Fender’s custom color charts; it’s a slightly pinkish version of *Fiesta Red*.

This ’64 arrived with its original hang tag. Aside from its small amount of case wear, it doesn’t suggest to me that it’s ever been properly played. (Well, I’ll take care of that, thank you very much.)

CBS TAKEOVER

As 1965 approached, it became clear to Don Randall and Leo Fender that they would have to expand their operation to meet the growing demand. This meant a substantial capital reinvestment. Leo, who was not in good health at that time, was reluctant and floated the idea of selling his shares to Don; Don countered with the idea that it was best for the both of them to find a buyer for the company.

So, on February 5, 1965, CBS bought out Fender for $13 million. To put that sum in perspective, the company had paid $2 million less to purchase the New York Yankees a year earlier! The CBS accountants came in, did their assessment, reporting back to HQ that Don Randall was the brains of the operation and that Leo was not as valuable—retaining him, nominally, as a consultant. (Wha-a-t? OK, fair enough; they were suits.) Leo signed a non-compete clause and set up his own workshop nearby, eventually establishing Music Man with his old colleague and Fender’s first plant manager, Forrest White; and then G&L Guitars with another ex-Fender man, George Fullerton. So clearly, the takeover didn’t put an end to his tinkering.

As for the Fender corporation, well, this is where it gets controversial. Terry Foster likes to say, “The Beatles killed the golden age of guitar building in America.” That

sounds harsh, but actually, many of the musicians, collectors, and dealers I've spoken to for this book volunteered the same idea—not just in regard to Fender, but to almost every brand in the US and abroad. Beatlemania and the British invasion did create an unprecedented demand for guitars that had to be met. All of a sudden, it seemed like every kid in the world wanted to be in a band, so guitar manufacturers had to double up on production, and fast. The crux of the controversy surrounding the CBS takeover and the years that followed it is: What was the impact on quality?

Well, expansion wasn't happening solely with Fender. As a result of the sudden jump in production, things began to change incrementally at Gibson, Höfner, and other smaller brands across the board as well—and I show some of those changes throughout the course of this book. Although some terrific instruments were produced throughout the 1960s, it's the guitars and basses from the early period—due to their craftsmanship and enduring tone quality—that are increasingly desired by collectors and players the world over.

1964

Fender Precision Bass

BLACK

When musicians talk to each other, they usually talk about which of their guitars is a “great player.” What does that mean, exactly? It means that although the instrument may be a little banged up, the neck feels like butter in your hands and the bass just sounds thunderous. This Black P-Bass, which I found in a shop in the UK, is an effin’ great player.

1965

Fender Precision Bass

BURGUNDY MIST METALLIC

(Refin)

Here’s a bass I got from my first bass tech, Skip Gildersleeve, who sadly passed on in 2013. Years ago it had been stripped to the wood; several parts were changed, and it had sat unused for ages. Then, when I got the vintage bug, I decided to take it out of mothballs and have another look. At the time I owned no Burgundy Mist Metallic basses, so Skully and I sent it to the Fender Custom Shop for refinishing. Turns out, it’s such a terrific-sounding Precision that I used it on the R40 Tour for “Jacob’s Ladder.” How’s that, eh, Skipper?

1965

Fender Precision Basses

DAKOTA RED

Here are two 1965 Dakota Red P-Basses. The one on the top is earlier and still shows features from the pre-CBS era; the one below has made the transition to show some new appointments. Gone is the nitro “green” guard, replaced by the white vinyl one, and pearloid dots have replaced clay ones. The “L” serial number neck plate (on the back) is replaced by the “F” plate.

1966

Fender Precision Bass

CANDY APPLE RED

(below, far left)

I see red! Pictured to the right of this glorious example of Candy Apple Red are three other Fender custom reds: ’65 Dakota Red Precision, ’59 Roman Red Stratocaster, and ’64 Fiesta Red Precision.

1966

Fender Precision Bass

FIREMIST GOLD

This photo shows the difference between two great examples of Fender custom gold colors: a ’66 Firemist on the left and a ’62 Shoreline on the right. Shoreline was only available until 1965.

Some instruments are made specifically for trade show events such as NAMM. In order to keep the integrity of the parts together, the shop used various methods to indicate it was a “show” instrument—sometimes stamps, sometimes a mark, on all the relevant pieces, hidden from view.

Many collectors won’t touch a mint instrument, and by that I mean they won’t even turn a screw for fear of setting loose a tiny piece of paint or harming the wood. Understandable, but sometimes, when there’s insufficient proof of provenance, you need to verify its authenticity. Musicians, of course, never fear such things, as they usually put their instruments through the wringer anyway. For me, being both a player and a collector, I’ve decided that turning the screw is the only way to go . . . carefully.

1966

Fender Precision Slab Bass

BLONDE

(United Kingdom Reissue)

I was really pleased to find this limited-production P-Bass, an homage to the slab bodies of the early 1950s: a return to that maple neck, headstock style, bridge, knobs, and tug bar, but with a contemporary pickup. I’d seen photographs of John Entwistle, owner of no less than three of them, playing one whose controls he’d modified (and later regretted doing so). “Unlike my

other basses," he once said, "it seemed to roar with a kind of extra ingredient you can't put your finger on."

John "the Ox" Entwistle at the Chelsea Barracks with his modified 1966 Precision *(Chris Morphet/Getty Images)*

According to *A Fender Bass for Britain* by Barry Matthews, this one is from a batch of only twenty-five made and exported to the UK in 1966 that featured the three-ply black pickguard and maple-capped neck that you see. (A second batch of unknown quantity started production at the end of the year, but had a couple of different features and stayed in the US.)

Top and bottom left: The maple fingerboard is briefly revived. Neck construction is two-piece, with the fingerboard separate. ***Bottom right:*** The three-ply, black-white-black vinyl pickguard wasn't used on any other Fender bass.

Interview with

Jeff Tweedy

Founding member of Wilco, bassist, guitarist, songwriter, producer, and prolific collector of all things musical

THE LOFT, CHICAGO, OCTOBER 12, 2017

Jeff Tweedy with his main man.

GEDDY LEE: Jeff, tell us where we are?

JEFF TWEEDY: This is the Wilco loft. We've been recording up here for about eighteen years. With each record and record deal, I've tried to make it more of a fully autonomous studio. Instead of spending money on other people's studios, I've always tried to take a little bit of the budget so we can make our records and not have to watch the clock ticking. It's not a built-out studio that everybody would desire to record in, but it's set up for us and always wired and ready to go. I work on something here every day. And it's a big space, two floors, with lots of room to accumulate more and more gear.

GL: But it’s very cozy. It doesn’t feel like a big space, even though it is.

JT: It’s pretty well curated, I think, at this point!

GL: So, let’s talk a little bit about your early days. Did you grow up in Chicago?

JT: I grew up in southern Illinois, closer to Saint Louis.

GL: And at what age did you first start to notice music in a serious way?

JT: My mother used to say that I would stand and cry and point at the stereo until she put a record on. So I don’t remember there being a time where music wasn’t a consolation for me. I still feel crappy until I find some new music to get me inspired and excited. My brothers and my sister are older than me, so I inherited their record collections when I was very young. I had Beatles and Dylan and Monkees records and all of that stuff, which really wasn’t from my time, but I loved it—more than they did. Then, when my brother came home from college and caught me filling out a Columbia House record club thing, he said, “That’s a scam. Here, you can have my records,” and he gave me a big peach crate full of Amon Düül and Kraftwerk and Aphrodite’s Child and super-weird music that a college kid was listening to at that time.

GL: Any Van der Graaf Generator?

JT: Yep. Atomic Rooster, Hawkwind. . . . So those are the two worlds colliding that, I think, is still somewhat evident in what I do.

GL: At what point did you know that you needed to pick up an instrument?

JT: I asked for guitar lessons when I was about six, and it was a horrible experience—a really hot room upstairs above a department store in downtown Belleville, where I grew up. The teacher wasn’t particularly nice, my fingers hurt, so I threw the guitar in my closet. But I would go to school and say, “I play guitar,” delusional to the point where I would take albums on a cassette that I had recorded and tell people, like, “*Born to Run*. This is my new record.” I don’t think anybody believed me, but I believed it. It’s delusional, but lying is a form of wishing or something, you know?

GL: It was aspirational!

JT: For sure. Then I had a bicycle accident when I was about twelve that laid me up in my bed over the summer, and I looked over and I saw the guitar and thought, “Well, maybe now’s a good time to learn how to play the guitar, in case somebody actually says—”

GL: Play “Born to Run.”

JT: Exactly! And around that time there were the Ramones and others that were more my speed, that I could connect to faster than the stuff on the radio at the time.

Kay

Jeff ’s Kay 162 “Howlin’ Wolf” with the Slim Jim pickup.

GL: So you were a guitarist first. Do you recall the first time you bought what you considered to be a good guitar?

JT: I had a Peavey first, that I traded for a Rickenbacker copy Custom. And it was even worse than the Peavey. Then my brother got a settlement from an accident on the railroad. Everybody in my family worked on the railroad. And he came home with a brand-new Fender Telecaster and gave it to me.

GL: Wow. How old were you?

JT: About fourteen. It wasn’t a good Telecaster, a 1980 or something, but it was the first best instrument I got. I started playing with some friends that ended up being Uncle Tupelo, my first band before Wilco. We were called the Primitives at that time, playing garage covers. Jay Farrar, my partner in that band, was pretty far along compared with me, so I switched to bass. My mom had a cousin who had a band before he went to Vietnam, and who owned a ’63 Jazz Bass, Burgundy Mist, with a B-15 Portaflex Ampeg, that he sold to her because when he came back from Vietnam he said that music had gotten crazy and he didn’t know how to play it anymore.

GL: He had good taste!

JT: Yeah. The most pro rig you can have, right off the bat. It wasn’t loud enough, but the bass itself was really great. It sadly had a pretty tragic death. We were already touring, and the Portaflex blew up, and this guy in St. Louis said he would trade me his amp, a big Seymour Duncan, which was crap, and I was like, “I don’t want to really do this as a permanent trade, but you keep my bass and when I come back we’ll switch back.” And the amp blew up on the road, so I had nothing to give back to him! I was hoping to eventually buy it back from him, but by that time he’d stripped it and made it into a fretless.

GL: Wow, but quite a story. . . . So, you had become a bass player, and your first bass was a Jazz Bass?

JT: Uh-huh. And shortly after that I was working in a tiny local music store, and somebody walked in with a P-Bass that he wanted to sell or trade in, and the owner of the store wasn't interested in it at all, because it was like a '68 neck on a '73 body, and Eddie Van Halen tape on it, but I said, "I'll give you a hundred and fifty bucks for it," and the guy sold it to me. That's the main bass that I still play all the time. It's got an "A" style P-Bass neck, which is really hard to find—more like a Jazz neck. I've always loved P-Basses, but I've never been able to find a really good vintage one that has all of the same qualities as that bass. It's not an aggressive bass, it's like a thumpy soul bass, a country bass.

GL: Well, yeah, you can twang 'em up or put some flatwounds on 'em! So, at that time in your life, transitioning to be a bass player, were you listening to songs in a different way, focusing on the bass parts?

JT: Occasionally I would see someone play that would inspire me, but my main orientation has always been to just make stuff up. I've not been a disciplined learner of scales or of other people's technique or anything like that. If I can hear it in my head I strive towards it, and as I learn I get better. So, after thirtysomething years, I'm starting to be able to play stuff off other people's records. It's always been a desire to make

something that's fresh to my ears, even if it's not necessarily fresh. I remember the first time I learned the rock 'n' roll riff, and I really, honestly, I'm so delusional, I thought I invented that! Like, "This is great. This is going to be huge! People are going to love this."

GL: [*Laughs*] That's fantastic!

JT: But to answer the question, I would see, like, a band like the Minutemen, with Mike Watt, who had a fantastic, unique voice as a bass player, and I'd go home and appropriate a little bit of that into what I did. But it would never be sustained or studious.

GL: So basses were just one more creative tool for you.

JT: Correct.

GL: Do you write songs on your bass?

JT: I just wrote a whole record for Mavis Staples, and I started with bass on most of those tracks. I got out the Rhythm King drum machine that's on all the Sly and the Family Stone records, and it was really inspiring to get in the headspace of those records. And I started with bass lines on a lot of it. I write on acoustic guitar predominantly, but there's always something to work on up here if I'm not particularly inspired. I feel like you don't write if you don't pick up the pencil. To keep it exciting for myself, I'll look up a new tuning, then start grabbing things and have no idea where I'm going. You always end up having like a little a-ha moment and having a bunch of songs.

GL: Alex [Lifeson] is exactly the same way. He loves and invents odd tunings. It does make you think differently, or stops you thinking too much. Do you find that the search for that spark is connected to the acquisition of some of these instruments?

JT: Collecting for me is not of just instruments but of sounds. I scour the internet, and I'll just become fixated on something. I see myself holding it and something good happening. A lot of times things come here and don't actually get picked up right away, but every once in a while I'll stroll around and find something I bought five years ago, and it becomes the basis of a track. It's a pretty bad business model, in a way!

GL: It's a passion you have to follow. We rationalize it by saying it's probably a good investment. "It's deductible, honey!" So, do you consider yourself a collector?

JT: Well, I obviously am a collector, but I'm not obsessive like people who want to have every custom color of every Fender Stratocaster from every

year. It's much more haphazard, like I'll watch a YouTube video of Link Wray and go, "What the hell guitar is that? I want one of those!" To be honest, the things that I don't play, even the things that are valuable and I know are good investments, I don't love them. And I'm tempted to get rid of them a lot of times. The only reason I don't is because I know if I ever wanted one again it would probably end up costing twice what I paid for it.

GL: I follow your Instagram account, Fonts of the Loft, and you seem very design aware—the logos and the patina, which is right up my alley, too. How did that idea come along?

JT: It's actually mostly Mark Greenberg, our studio manager. We all talk about this stuff, but he took the initiative to share it with people. The original patina thing is really interesting because so many manufacturers make relic'd guitars. But there's nothing compared to. . . . Like, I have a Trini Lopez that somebody carved an Indian head into, and it's the coolest-looking thing ever, you know? Nobody's ever going to do that at a custom shop. Once, I bought a 1950s J-200, a Gibson acoustic, and inside there was really yellowed Scotch tape that was falling off with a phone number. It said, "Bob." So we called, thinking surely Bob's dead, but no. He was part of an Ernest Tubb Western show in Nashville, and had a couple of 45s out in the 1950s and 1960s. He sent us a picture!

GL: Now that's real provenance.

JT: Actually, I have two J-200s from roughly the same period, both with double pickguards, and one says "Bob" and one says "Buck." Like, hey! I can't believe I found both those guitars!

GL: When you're looking for an instrument, what kind of things do you find visually irresistible?

JT: Just a crazy design. Like the 1960s and 1970s, when many guitars were designed with this notion of the good old future, when everything was kind of forward leaning. We were entering this space age, and people wanted instruments to say something about our modernity. Not to get too philosophical, but there's something really hopeful about those instruments to me. Even when they're Japanese, maybe even especially some of the old Japanese stuff, even though they're hardly ever playable. Everything in our culture is much more fragmented now. There's little tribes of different thought, and people maybe have to have a degree in design to understand what the references are. Industrial design now to me

seems to be reflecting a desire to hang on to what we have. People are fearful and want to feel secure. In that period, I'm sure there was no lack of fear, with the atomic weapons and things like that still fresh in everyone's memory, but there was much more of an overall design momentum towards a better future.

GL: Good old-fashioned American optimism! Like the T-Bird Bass, a positive look at the future.

JT: Recently I've been getting into Czechoslovakian and Soviet bloc guitars, and it's interesting—they don't quite get it. They're like, "I like the future, but it still should look like a *balalaika*."

GL: [*In a Russian accent*] "With large iron knob."

Left to right: Jolana Iris bass—Jeff says, "These are terrible basses from Czechoslovakia, but they have a really incredible low end. One of my favorite features is built into the strap pin [*opens panel*] . . . a flathead screwdriver!"; Orfeus Hebros bass—"First time I set down this 1960s Soviet Bulgaria-made bass, it just went *shunk*."

(Note the misspelling of "Orpheus."); Maton Teardrop—"This is not a good lap guitar"; the Höfner Club Bass that Wilco's bassist, John Stirratt, has been using for years.

Fender

Jazz Bass

Could have been on tour in the spring of 1977. I had a day off before our show at Wings Stadium in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I wasn't the kind of guy to go scouring the pawn shops, but my bass tech at the time, Skip Gildersleeve, most assuredly was, and it was he who suggested we spend the day bargain hunting. "What the hell," I said. "Let's go." Hanging on the wall in one of the smaller shops were numerous guitars and just a few basses . . . among them a Black Fender Jazz Bass with a cool-looking blonde neck sporting black block markers. The tag said "$250 NO CASE." It had a cigarette burn on the headstock (in the usual place), but since I'd never owned a blonde-necked instrument, I decided it was for me. I offered two hundred dollars, the guy at the cash register generously threw in a cardboard case, and I walked away with my first Jazz Bass.

For a few years, I played it only for fun, and I didn't really understand the instrument until the *Moving Pictures* recording sessions. I was having a tough time getting the right tone out of my Rickenbacker 4001 for "Tom Sawyer" and, exasperated, decided to give the '72 Jazz a try instead. Paul Northfield, our engineer at the time, plugged in a tube compressor, made a couple of quick adjustments, and bingo! He got a terrific top-end twang out of it not dissimilar to a Ricky. More important, the bottom end sounded tight and deep, and melded perfectly with Neil's bass drums.

Still, I was pretty addicted to the Rick-O-Sound, so it wasn't until many years later, while recording the *Counterparts* album with engineer Kevin "Caveman" Shirley, that the Jazz finally became my Number One. The Caveman was all about old-school analogue sound, and after my flings with the solid-state sounds of Steinberger and Wal, he was insistent on a back-to-basics approach. I disagreed at the time, but I sheepishly confess now that he was dead right. The Jazz sounded excellent, perfect in the context of the music we were getting into at that time. And I haven't looked back.

Now I have to explain the connection between that bass and the many more you're about to see: I felt a need to understand exactly why my '72 Jazz sounded so right. After it became my Number One, I began looking for others of that period—between 1972 and 1974—in order to have a backup instrument that sounded the same, but that Pawn Shop Special was hard to match, and again and again I wondered why. What was this witchcraft?

That Fender era has its detractors, I know, but for me this particular '72 had the sound I wanted, and I needed to know if it was a one-off or if there were others with the same tone. It might have been purely subjective; maybe the instruments of the period simply suited my needs. Or maybe it was something in the way they were winding pickups then, in combination with the brighter tone of the maple necks. I had to know.

Skully and I decided to acquire one Jazz Bass from each and every year since its inception in 1960, right through to 1972 (all custom colors with matching headstocks when possible, of course), then play them back to back and study them from the outside in. Well, that's how it started anyway. I learned that certain instruments have their own alchemical formula—and part of that *is* some kind of magic. But I also learned a helluva lot about Leo's basses in the bargain.

Of course, I did get a little carried away. As Terry Foster would say, "All collectors are wacko."

1960

Fender Jazz Bass

BLONDE

To kick off, here’s the earliest Jazz Bass in my collection, a stack knob put together in September 1960. It has a beautiful rosewood slab board neck with “clay” dots. The guard picks up on the change begun in ’59 when the Precision Bass switched from gold anodized to four-layer tortoiseshell.

Leo flip-flopped on the knob design: we've seen prototypes from around 1959 with three knobs, but when it was released in 1960, it had concentric "stacked" knobs, and then, sometime in '62, he went back to three again. (The stacked knobs have volume controls for each pickup on top, and tone for each on the bottom, while the three-knob configuration has two volume controls, but only one for overall tone.)

THE FIRST JAZZ

After eight years, Fender decided it was time for a different type of bass, for a different type of player. The Jazzmaster had appeared in 1958, and now the Jazz arrived as its top-of-the-line bass partner. Leo and his men designed it with an offset body like a Jazzmaster but with Strat-like horns elongated to improve the instrument's balance, countering the long neck and the extra-heavy headstock. Crucially, it has a narrower, faster neck with a rosewood slab fingerboard, a fairly complex mute assembly, two newly designed double-pole pickups to give you a wider tonal range, and, of course, the two shiny concentric "stacked" knobs.

NEW! The Jazz Bass not only incorporates individual two-way micro-adjustable bridges for perfect string intonation and heights but also employs adjustable damping arms for any degree of sustained tone.
NEW! Dual pickups have two pole pieces for each string. These provide instant string response and full tone during string vibration. Tandem tone and volume control for each pickup permit mixing of the pickups plus further bass and treble boost whenever desired by the player.
NEW! 1-7/16", that's the actual size of the Jazz Bass neck at the nut . . . more slender than most any guitar. This revolutionary neck design facilitates rapid playing technique of the most difficult musical passages. In addition, it is truss-rod reinforced to assure perfect neck alignment at all times.
FENDER JAZZ BASS
Another Fender First!
The Jazz Bass is Fender's newest addition to the field of electric basses and represents the standards by which others will be compared. It offers the musician greater playing comfort, faster playing action, and the finest bass tone reproduction. The "off-set"* waist design contributes greatly to the playing ease and comfort of the musician. In addition, the portability and light weight of the Jazz Bass will be readily appreciated by every bassist. Be sure to try this outstanding new instrument at your Fender dealer.
Fender
SALES, INC.
SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA
*Patent Pending
Sold by leading music dealers throughout the world

Fender Jazz advertisement, 1961

In the end, Leo gave buyers an option: the P-Bass everyone knew and loved, or this new, more elite instrument that was meant to appeal to the more discerning

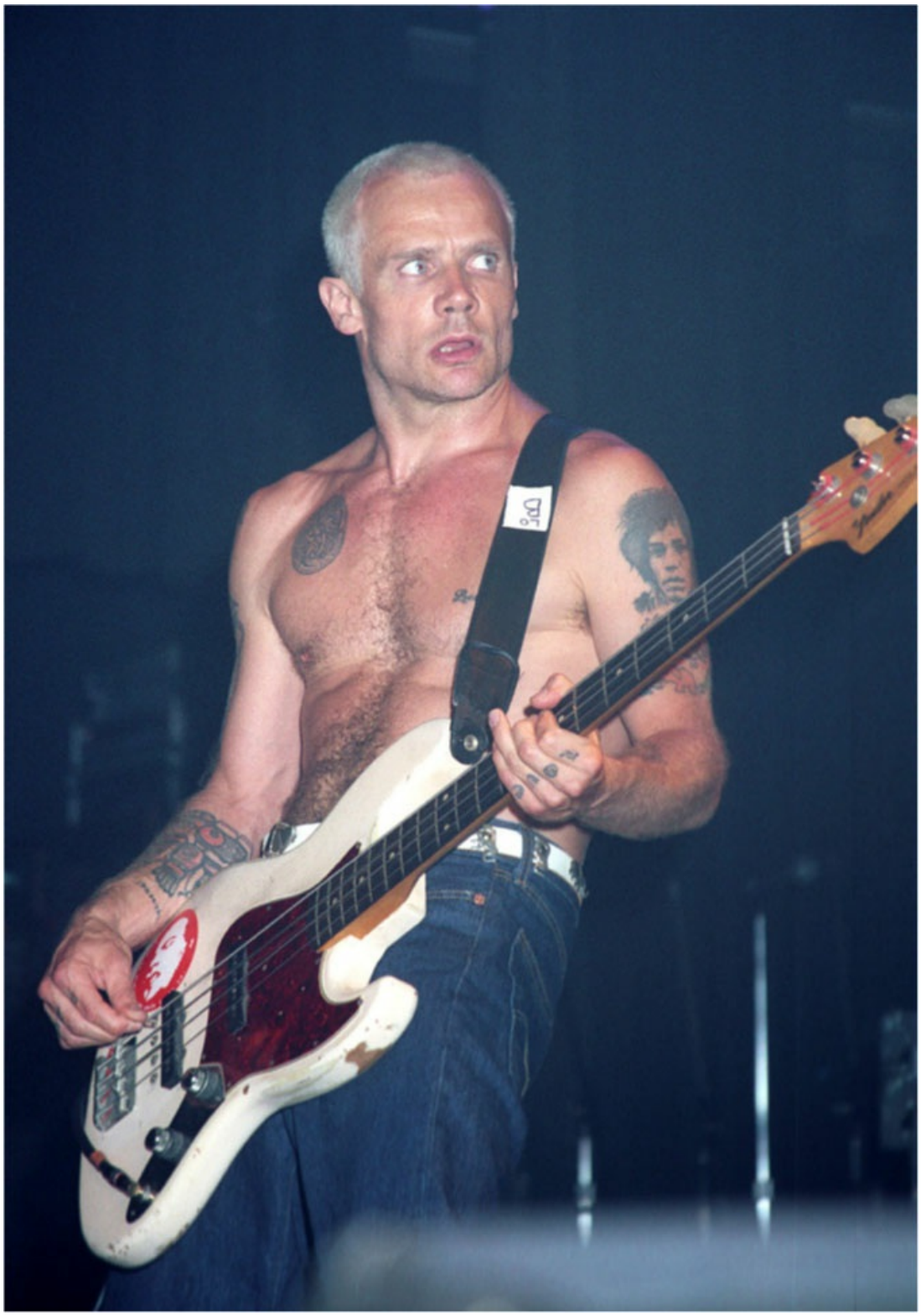
1960

Fender Jazz Bass

FIESTA RED

(Refin)

In my experience, these necks from the pre-CBS era are a treat to play. The profile, or depth, of the neck is thinner and therefore faster than the later models—for me, at least. It simply fits better in my hand. (These unbound necks tend to have more of a “C” shape, with the radius beginning immediately below the fingerboard; the later, bound necks have a bit of a flat side where the binding is, and *then* the radius begins, giving them more of a chunky “D” shape.) This bass plays great and has superb twang. I used it nightly on the R40 Tour for the song “The Spirit of Radio.”



Flea in 2004 playing his super-rare ’61 Shell Pink stack knob, which a fan gave him after he’d stated that he wanted a pre-CBS Jazz so he could be “as cool as John Paul Jones” *(Christina Radish/Getty*

Images)

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

This refinished Fiesta Red was the very first stack knob that I purchased for my collection. At the time, I was excited simply to find an early '60, but (as is so often the story) someone had painted over the body in black, and the beautiful tortoiseshell pickguard in white! Skully and I decided to restore it. We sent the body back to the Fender Custom Shop, where they did a fine factory "refin," while Skully painstakingly removed every inch of paint from the pickguard, returning it to its former glory.

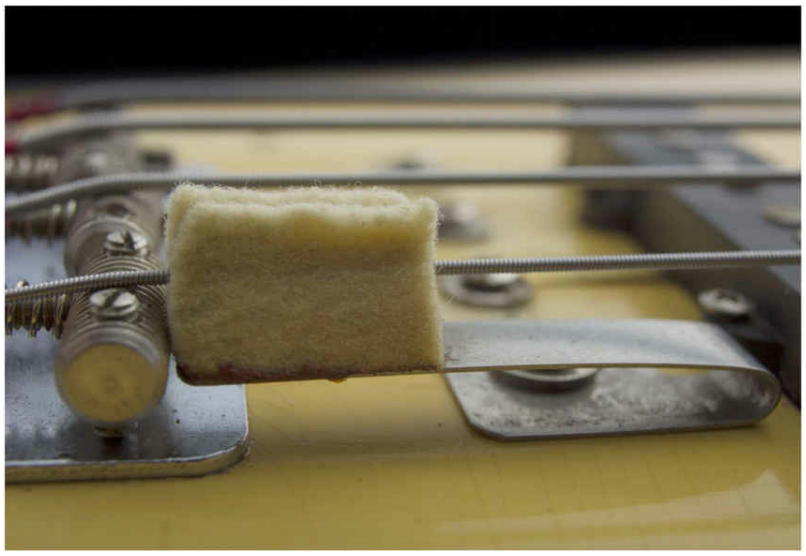
1961

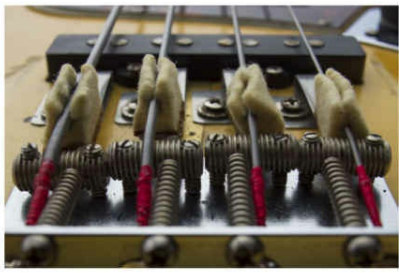
Fender Jazz Bass

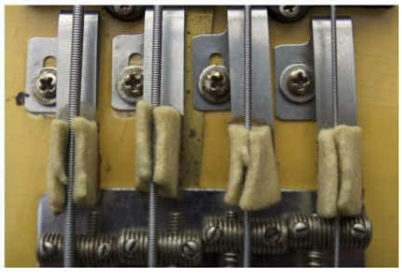
BLONDE

I find this group of shots fascinating to look at, with its screws, spring steel, and bits of felt around each string. I imagine it was intended to re-create the

traditional muted upright “doghouse” sound, but to the modern player it’s not very useful. By 1963, these felt mutes had all but disappeared, replaced by the same foam strip under the bridge cover that had been in use on the P-Bass since the beginning.







1961

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK

Custom-color stack knobs are rare birds indeed—and Black was a true custom color then. So you can imagine how thrilled I was to acquire one in such incredible shape and with such a well-documented past.

JAZZ BASS
TRADE MARK
ELECTRIC BASS
PAT PEND

OFFSET
Contour Body
PAT PEND

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

This single-owner stack knob was unearthed at a guitar show in Texas and, happily, a couple of pals who were there helped me acquire it. The bass was specially ordered in 1961 by Tommy McBryar from Al Miller Music on Cherry Street in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where Tommy played for the celebrated local doo-wop band the Viva Tones. In the documents that accompanied it, his daughter, Cynthia, writes, "He treated this bass as if it were precious cargo. . . . When you play or look at the guitar, please remember that it was once played by a person who made music a major part of his life until the day he could not enjoy the music any longer."

There are no absolutes with vintage instruments, but based on our small sample, it would seem that until late ’62 all Jazz Basses were fitted with tortoiseshell guards—all, that is, except black ones, which had white (a.k.a. “green”) guards—which is also true for P-Basses of this period. After ’62, of course, both Precisions and Jazz Basses of the pre-CBS era were fitted with white guards.

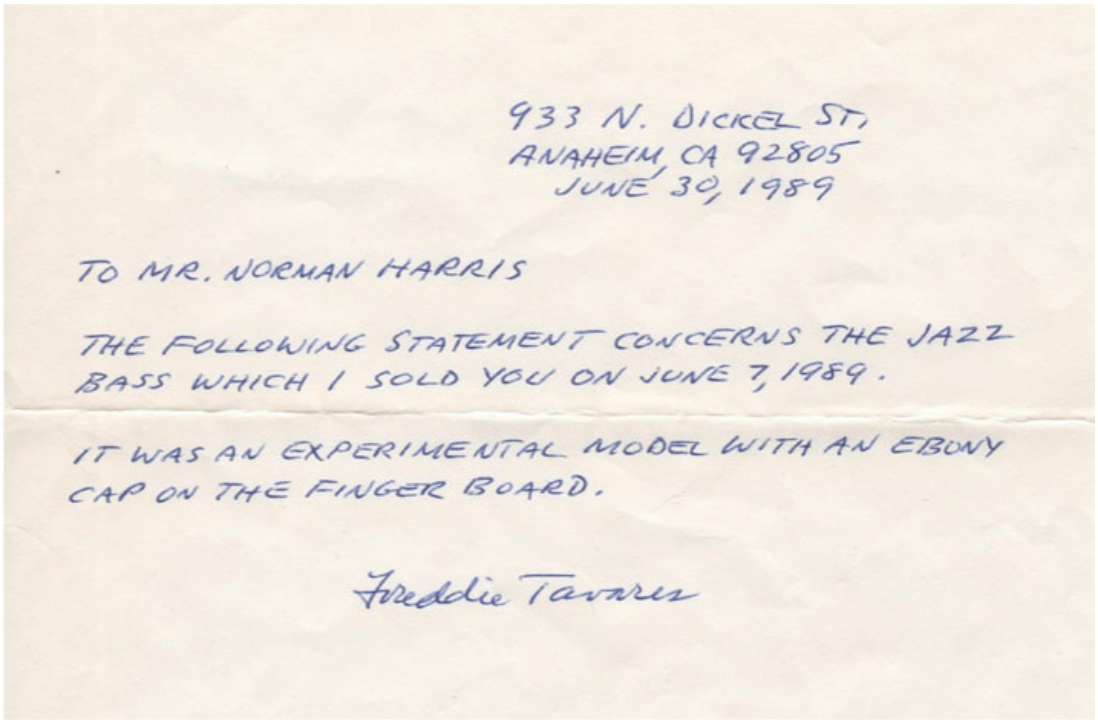
1961

Fender Jazz Bass

BLONDE

(Tavares Prototype)

This bass once belonged to Leo Fender's close associate Freddie Tavares. I bought it from collector and admitted "Fenderologist" Ken Collins. The bass is a bit of a mutt: the body and original three-knob configuration are from 1960 (the date of the untouched pots bears this out), yet the neck is dated 1961—firmly in the era of the stack knob—and features a unique radiused laminate fingerboard of vulcanized fiber. According to Terry Foster, Freddie was much more involved with amp design at Fender, so it's not surprising that when he sold the bass almost thirty years later and stated the fingerboard was made of ebony, he either misremembered or never knew exactly what material was used. We will likely never know how it ended up on this experimental neck, or if it was ever intended to replace the rosewood slab fingerboard of the period. But it remains an intriguing and early example of an instrument used by the only musician in Leo's inner circle.



933 N. DICKEL ST,
ANAHEIM, CA 92805
JUNE 30, 1989

TO MR. NORMAN HARRIS

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT CONCERNS THE JAZZ BASS WHICH I SOLD YOU ON JUNE 7, 1989.

IT WAS AN EXPERIMENTAL MODEL WITH AN EBONY CAP ON THE FINGER BOARD.

Freddie Tavares

Letter written by Freddie Tavares upon the sale of his bass

Clearly, Freddy Tavares liked his bass close at hand, so he cut a hole in the back of the neck plate to hang it on the wall.

ROSEWOOD

Rosewood is a timeworn material for luthiers, and manufacturers like Gibson have always used it. The Precision Bass transitioned to it from maple, and the Jazz Bass inherited it. As you can see in the photo below, the slab board is a thick piece of rosewood that the truss rod nut lightly bites into. Fender used this on the Jazz from 1959 to late ’62, when it moved to a radiused rosewood laminate, or veneer. Pictured in between is Tavares’s vulcanized fiber fingerboard—which happens to be the same material Fender used for pickup bobbins.

WHO WAS FREDDIE TAVARES?

Hawaii-born Freddie Tavares played steel guitar professionally. (He recorded the zingy slide at the start of the Looney Tunes theme song). He was Leo's right-hand man in the lab, bringing the musician's perspective to the work that Leo was doing. "You might say we didn't have an R&D department that was called as such," Tavares is quoted as saying in Richard Smith's *Fender: The Sound Heard 'Round the World*. "But Leo Fender and myself were the two people in the design end of it." He advised on such things as the Strat and the Jazz Bass, and he would road test both guitars and amps, but he wasn't involved in actual production.

“The character of a great Jazz bass, especially one of this vintage, to me represents the very essence of the electric bass guitar more than any other.”

—GAIL ANN DORSEY

A flight of Fiesta Reds, showing changes over the course of one year: *(left to right)* ’61, early ’62, and later ’62

1961

Fender Jazz Bass

FIESTA RED

This bass has been around the block. My God, it oozes mojo. I love the way the color's been played right off of it and how you can see past the layers of paint, through the desert sand undercoat, down to the wood itself.

Another super-rare, early custom-color Jazz Bass. I acquired it in the UK from Alan Rogan, a highly knowledgeable collector (and a bit mad, like me). He tells me that Brits often refer to Fiesta Red as "Salmon Pink," although that's never been an official Fender color.

(RB/Redferns)

A FIESTAVUS FOR THE REST OF US

Legend has it that the craze for Fiesta Red in the UK was sparked when Hank Marvin of the Shadows, the backing band behind the pop star Cliff Richard, was seen playing a red Strat with gold hardware (above, in 1960) that Richard had bought for him. Young players of the day all wanted one "just like Hank's." Iconic! Pictured here are ten Fiesta Red instruments, the hue varying slightly from one to the next. In the 1950s, before Fender published color charts, the company was known to use "Roman Red," a shade that lies somewhere between what we now know as "Dakota" and "Fiesta." As described elsewhere in this book, the formula varied slightly depending on the day they were shooting the color, which has led to a variety of "pink" misnomers, including what Marvin himself referred to as his "Flamingo Pink." It remains a talking point among guitar nerds.

Roman
Red
T-412

Early 1962

Fender Jazz Bass

FIESTA RED

Early ’62, with a cool combo of Fiesta, tortoise guard, and a particularly gorgeous slab neck. It’s an interesting transition instrument, too, as the stack

knobs are now gone.

The ’62 Jazz Basses have a big, bold, and ballsy sound, which makes that year far and away my favorite of the pre-CBS era. I cannot say for certain whether it was the change to the new three-knob configuration or just a perfect storm of ingredients, but the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. Jaco’s Bass of Doom is a ’62; the bass John Paul Jones played on all the early Led Zep records is a ’62; and I noticed at the 2017 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame show, while admiring Gail Ann Dorsey’s great playing and deep powerful tone with Lenny Kravitz’s band, that she was playing what appeared to be an early three-knob Olympic White (mute holes, tortoise guard, matching headstock, and all). There’s a *reason* great players are drawn to Jazz Basses of this period.

Later 1962

Fender Jazz Bass

FIESTA RED

Fender
JAZZ BASS
ELECTRIC BASS

Et voilà. By the end of 1962, the matching headstock has made its debut. I love this feature, and I always make a point of looking for Jazz Basses with it. The other changes of significance that occurred at this point were the introduction of the veneer rosewood fingerboard and the white nitro “green” guard.

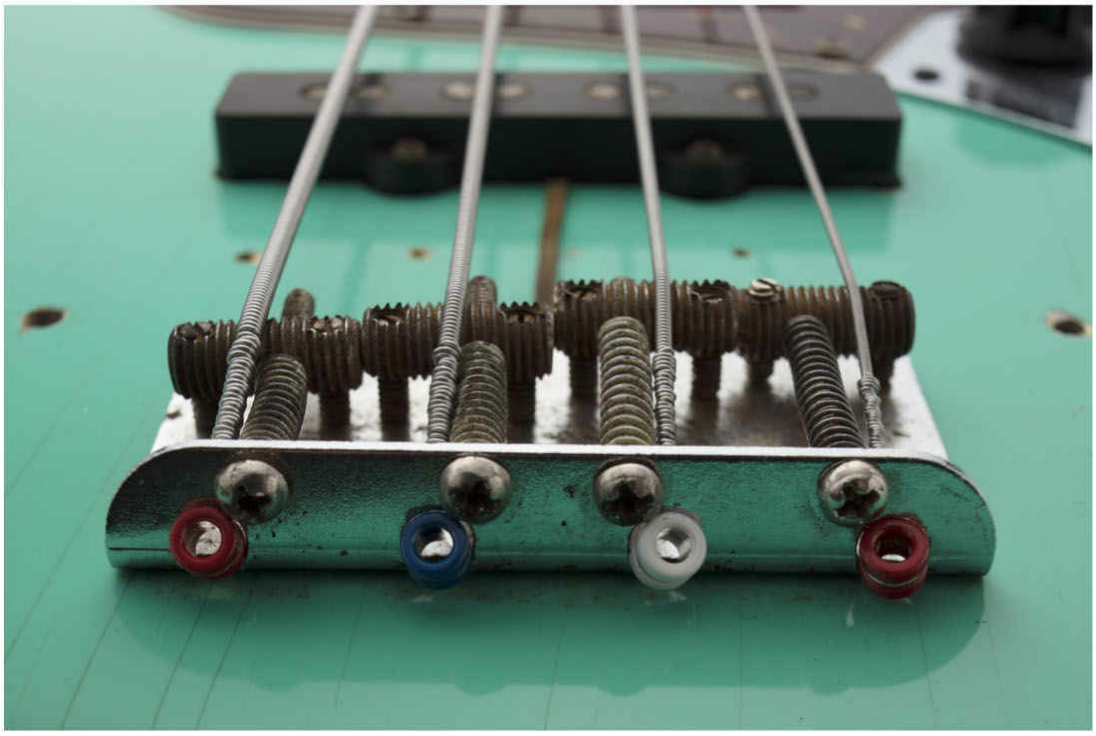
On the R40 Tour, this one found its home on “Working Man,” which closed the night. It’s bittersweet to realize that it’s the bass on which I played the final note of Rush’s very final concert at the Los Angeles Forum on August 1, 2015. *(Neil Pearl)*

1962

Fender Jazz Bass

FOAM GREEN

(Refin)



Searching for an all-original custom-color 1962 Jazz Bass, I actually became impatient. I badly wanted to test out the feel of a pre-CBS neck combined

with the legendary tone from that year, so when I saw this Foam Green refin for sale, I pounced on it. Without question, it's one of the most thrilling basses I own. The more I use it, the more it's starting to edge out my Number One '72 Jazz.

When we plugged it in during the rehearsals for R40, we were quite literally blown away by its tone and power—especially in the bottom end. It was also louder than a lot of my other basses, so we utilized our Axe-FX Fractal unit to level the playing field. That's the meaning of the word "benchmark." Every '62 I have shares that tone—in slightly differing degrees, perhaps, but it's there. On the R40 Tour I played this beast on "Headlong Flight" and "Far Cry"; I also played it in 2017 at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as the guest bassist with Yes on "Roundabout."

1962

Fender Jazz Bass

SUNBURST

Fender
JAZZ BASS

1962

Fender Jazz Bass

OLYMPIC WHITE

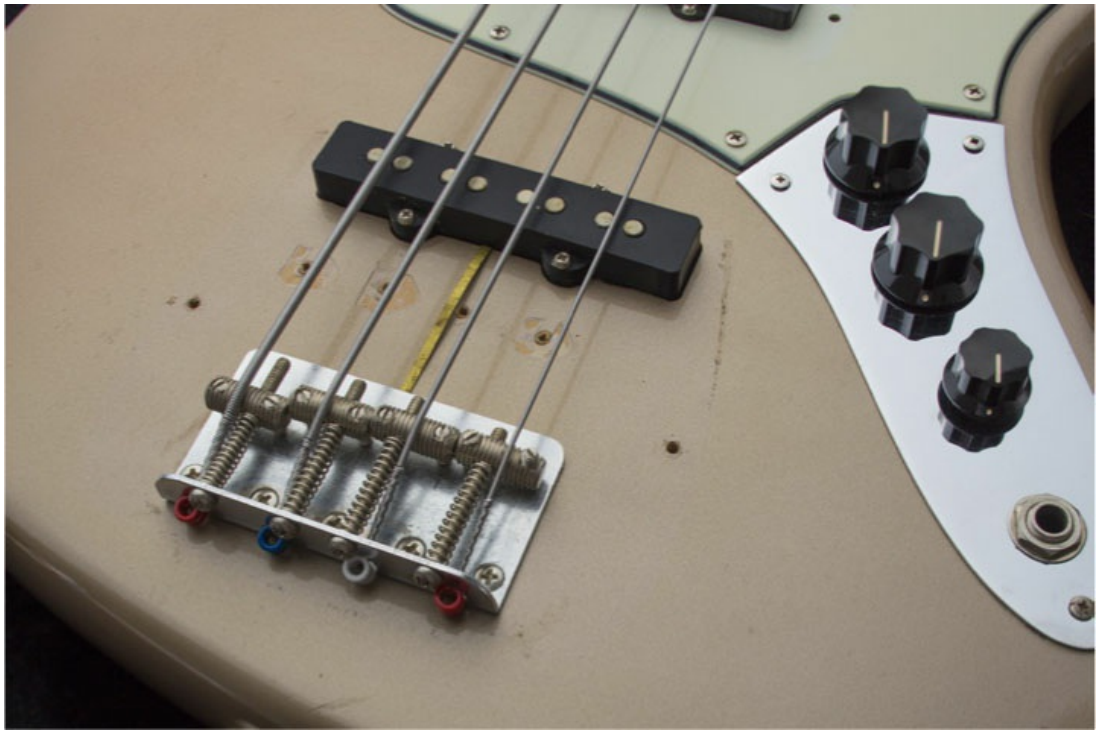
Fender
JAZZ BASS

Veteran bassist Gail Ann Dorsey playing a late ’61 three-knob “Oly White” Jazz Bass, while performing with Lenny Kravitz in Atlanta, Georgia, 2015 *(Chris McKay/Getty Images)*

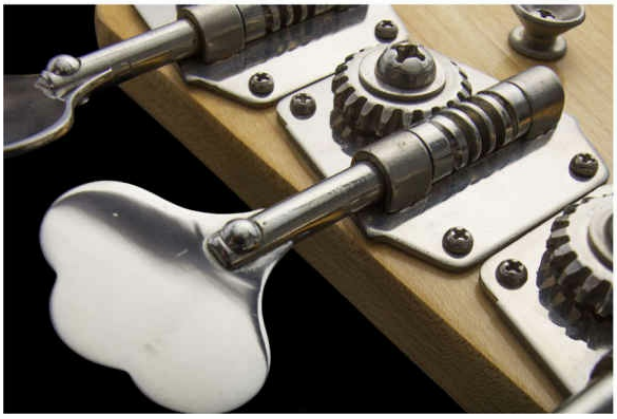
1963

Fender Jazz Bass
SHORELINE GOLD

Since I’m a certified fetishist for custom colors and desperately wanted an early Shoreline Gold Jazz, it was thrilling to add this pristine bass to my collection.



Although mutes generally disappeared by mid-’63, this one still has them.



There’s gold, and then there’s . . . *gold*. Gold instruments have been spotted from the late 1950s, sometimes with gold parts; those are true one-offs. As official custom colors, though, Shoreline Gold Metallic was featured on Fender color charts from 1960 to 1965, and Firemist Gold Metallic from 1965 to 1971. Still, accurate identification can be tough, because the pre-CBS period was one of pre-computerized paint-blending, so most of these instruments have slightly different hues. Apparently, Fender never mixed more paint than it needed for a batch, leaving it open to formula variations. So, if Billy was the paint mixer on a given day, but he wasn’t there the next

and Bobby added a little more white than usual . . . well, you get the picture.

Left to right: 1966 Firemist Gold Precision Bass; ’62 Shoreline Gold Jaguar; ’66 Firemist Gold Jazz Bass; ’63 Shoreline Gold Jazz Bass; ’66 Firemist Gold Jazz Bass; ’62 Shoreline Gold Strat; ’62 Shoreline Gold Precision Bass

1963

Fender Jazz Bass

FIESTA RED

By mid-1963, the original-style screw-in mute assembly with felt tabs had been replaced by a strip of foam on the inside of the bridge cover.

1963

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK

A riot of 1964 custom colors. You don’t really appreciate a custom finish until you see it in broad daylight. Left to Right: Dakota Red; Lake Placid Blue; Black; Sonic Blue; and Candy Apple Red.

1964

Fender Jazz Bass

SONIC BLUE

One of the coolest names for a custom color, Sonic Blue wasn’t very popular back in the day (like Foam Green), which makes it pretty rare and highly sought-after now. It was a Duco paint used on 1956 Cadillacs. Both John Lennon and George Harrison famously played matching Sonic Blue Stratocasters, but George refinished the front of his with Pattie Boyd’s green nail polish.

Fender
JAZZ BASS
ELECTRIC BASS

The “Offset Contour Body” logo has migrated to the ball end of the headstock. Ooh, sexxxy!

1964

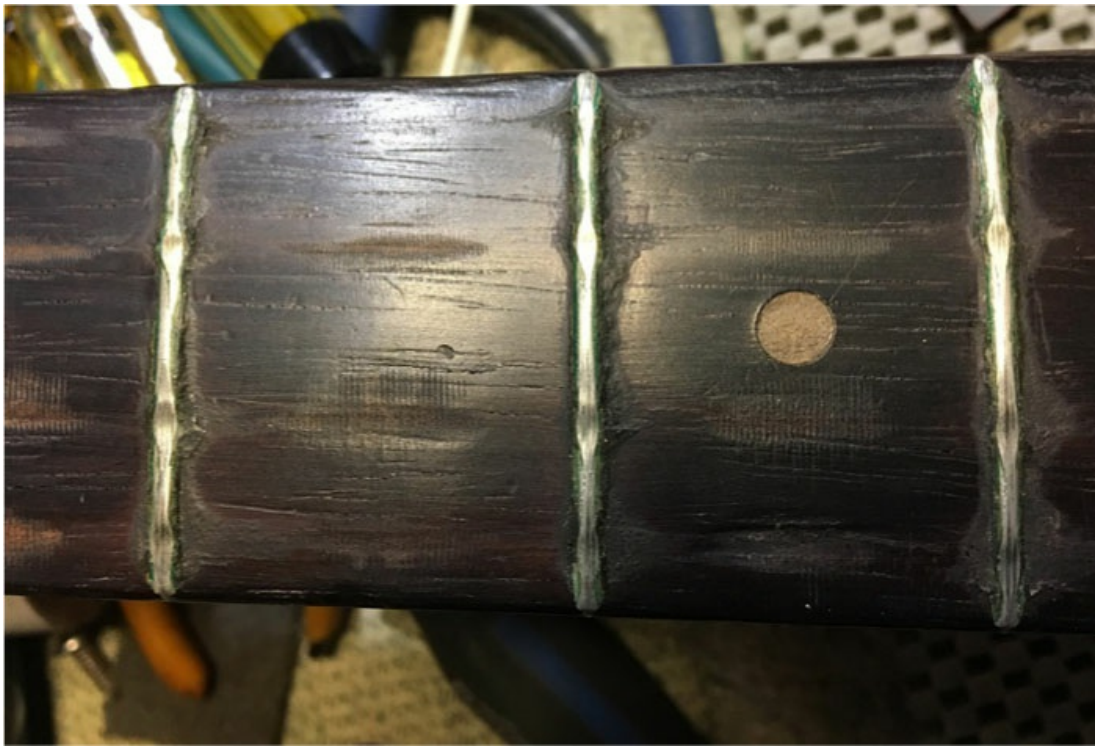
Fender Jazz Basses

DAKOTA RED

Beauty and the beast. These two instruments boil down the two different aspects of collecting that, in a way, are at the heart of this book. Above, on

the left, is Mr. Minty, an unplayed 1964 Dakota Red, and on the right is a fella that's been barhopping for more than fifty years; one shows all the glory of its original condition, as if in a time capsule, and the other has made someone a living.

Then and now. It's always great to find a one-owner instrument—in this case, a mojo monster. It still smells of cigarettes and beer. This bass was purchased from a shop in Dublin, which sold it on behalf of Jack Ruane Jr. (pictured with said bass) of County Mayo, Ireland.



Skully took this shot of the fingerboard before refretting it and scrubbing off fifty-plus years of hard-earned grunge.

1964

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK

I particularly love the way Fender treats the logo on these black headstocks—by just having the word “Fender” in gold. (This is often referred to as a “clipped” logo.)

Fender

1964

Fender Jazz Bass

CANDY APPLE RED

I was extremely fortunate to find this piece of Candy Apple Red just a couple of weeks after I found the Black ’64 that shares this page. They’re both so clean and unplayed that it’s a veritable mintapalooza.

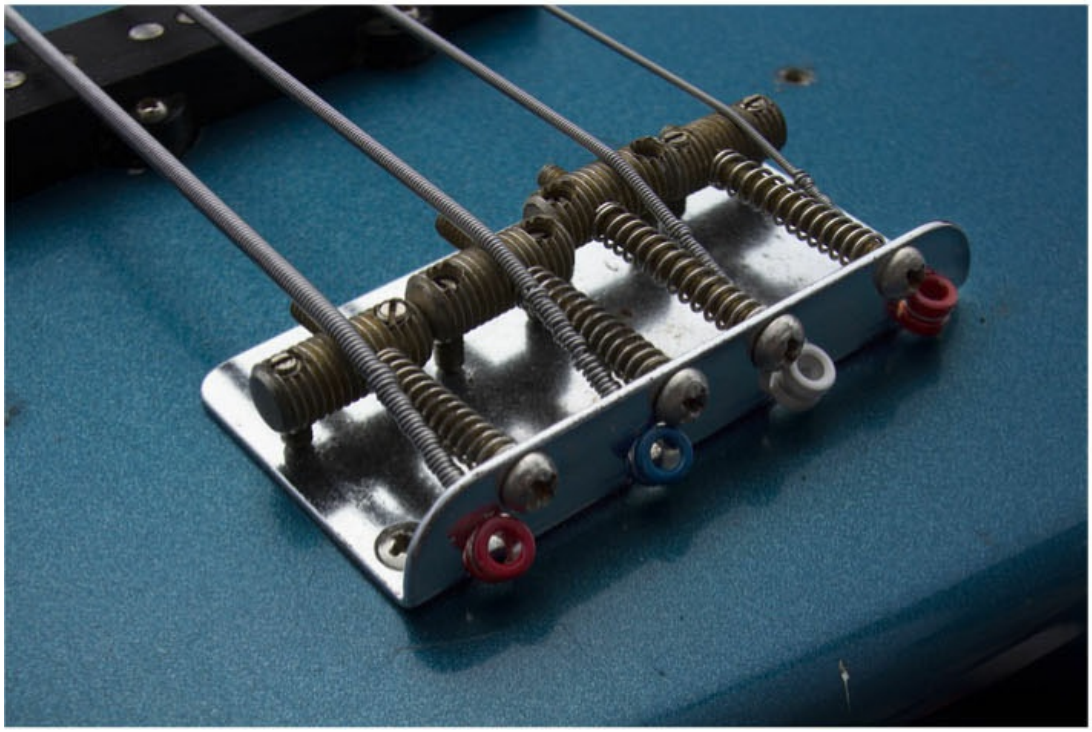
1964

Fender Jazz Bass

LAKE PLACID BLUE

This is one of the truest examples of Lake Placid Blue Metallic I've ever laid eyes on. It hasn't yellowed one iota. Despite its near-pristine condition, it has a nicely worked-in neck and is one of my favorites to play. I used it on the R40 Tour on "Subdivisions."

Fender



Pictured above in their seven degrees of loveliness are, from left to right: a 1966 Jazzmaster, a ’71 Jazz, a ’66 Jazz, a ’63 Precision, a ’64 Jazz, a ’68 Jazz, and a ’67 Coronado guitar

As most Fender fans already know, custom colors were borrowed directly from the automobile industry. Lake Placid Blue Metallic, as pictured here in its various conditions and stages of aging, was a color made for Cadillac (the Brougham, to be precise). Lake Placid Blue was one of Fender’s most popular custom colors, available from 1960 to 1973 on various instruments. Metallic finishes require a clear coat to prevent oxidization, but the irony is that it’s the clear coat that discolors when exposed to UV light, not the paint itself. They’re cool to find in their true-blue state, but sometimes they do green up quite nicely, too.

1965

Fender Jazz Bass

BURGUNDY MIST METALLIC

In this collector’s humble opinion, there’s no more fitting welcome to 1965 than Burgundy Mist Metallic, one of the coolest custom colors. Fender was now owned by CBS, and so 1965 was a transition year.

In the pre-CBS era, winding pickups had been a semi-manual machine operation, a.k.a. “scatter-winding,” in which a person would guide the pickup wire onto a rotating bobbin. As of 1965, Fender began to use a fully automated process. Controversially, some would say that from that point on, pickup tone became more consistent, but at the cost of a loss of character.

Pearl dots replace “clay,” vinyl replaces nitro, and for all you übernerds, Fender begins using standard pickguard screws on the control plate and the covers.

1965

Fender Jazz Bass

SILVER SPARKLE

Vintage sparkle-finished basses are true one-offs. The finishes were made from crushed mirror or metal flake, suspended in poly. They were only available by special request, and they seem to be the rarest of all Fender custom instruments. Fender wasn’t properly set up for spray-sparkle finishes, so it outsourced them to local automobile customizers and hot rod builders, which were all over SoCal at the time. This bass dates to 1965, and it walks the line between pre- and post-CBS takeover, with the older reverse clover leaf tuners, newer bound neck with pearl dots, and, unusually for a Jazz Bass, a pearloid pickguard. You can tell these things are made for the spotlight. They come alive the moment there’s direct light on them, whether it’s in a room in Vegas or a honky-tonk in Bakersfield (or the Air Canada Centre, for

that matter).

CAVEAT EMPTOR, OR “BUYER BEWARE”

Doyle Holly playing his Sparkle P-Bass with Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, 1969

Because there are so few of these critters, salespeople love to claim their Sparkle has a kinship to the Buckaroos of Bakersfield (Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, including bassist Doyle Holly, famously used all-Sparkle instruments). This one, like Doyle’s, has a crushed-mirror poly finish, but that’s where the similarity ends. Every shot I’ve seen of him playing bass with the Buckaroos shows his Sparkles have maple fingerboards, not rosewood.

In Leo’s factory, there was no one way to approach a custom color. Some had a desert sand undercoat, some had white, and sometimes they’d spray over an existing sunburst. Examine this Silver Sparkle,

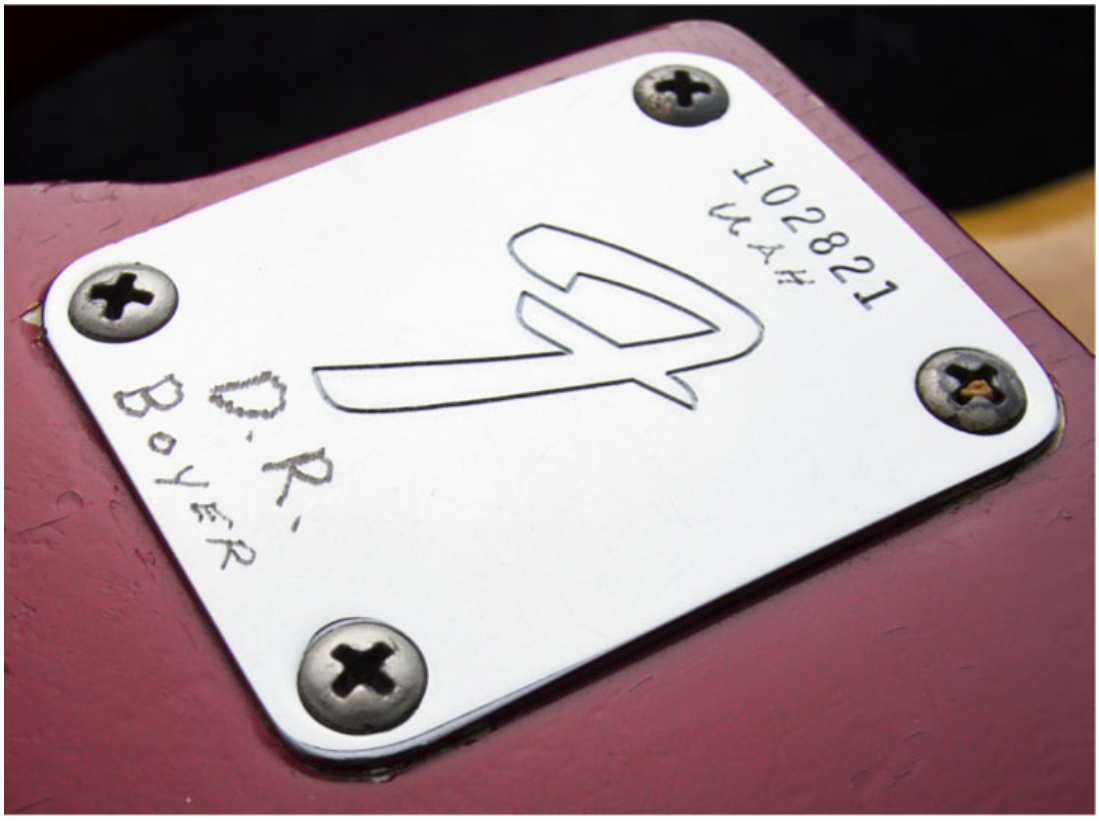
and you can see there’s no color below its topcoat at all. Terry Foster, who owns a couple of Sparkle instruments himself, and has inspected many more (including a raft of pretenders), says, “I’ve seen real ones with a different finish underneath, which makes sense, ’cause they didn’t waste anything.”

1965

Fender Jazz Bass

CANDY APPLE RED

This bass had its starring role in the song “Cygnus X-1” on the R40 Tour. It acquitted itself with great aplomb and the appropriate amount of thunder.



The “F” plate makes its debut this year, and on this particular one, a previous owner carved his name. I have numerous instruments that have been personalized in this manner. Many people etch their driver’s license number or other personal info somewhere on the instrument. I like this practice, as it speaks to a more innocent age, when people felt that if they lost their guitar, someone might return it to them. (By the way, “UAH” stands for University of Alabama, Huntsville.)

1965

Fender Jazz Bass

OLYMPIC WHITE

The person who made this bass at Fender chose a lovely piece of flamed maple for the neck. It was clearly put together with extra TLC, and it plays like it, too. I used it for the song “The Wreckers” on the R40 Tour.

By 1966, CBS production was up, and people were ordering more custom colors than before the takeover. While still scarce, custom-colored instruments from 1965 and 1966 seem to be easier to find than ones from the pre-CBS era.

1966

Fender Jazz Bass

FIESTA RED

Fender used a variety of codes on the bodies and sometimes neck cavities to flag or prioritize work to be done on the busy factory floor. With a few hands on any given instrument, it was important to indicate, for example, a “repair and return,” a “refin,” or an “accelerated order.” There’s no official legend to the codes, so their meaning has been passed down anecdotally. “ES” likely

stands for “Entered Special.” In this shot, the stamp under the pickguard indicates that the instrument required extra care, as it was either destined for a guitar show or was a custom order for a dealer.

1965

Fender Jazz Bass

BURGUNDY MIST METALLIC

The Burgundy Mists of time. . . . Pictured below is the same ’65 Burgundy

Mist that we have seen earlier in this chapter alongside its pristine ’66 counterpart, clearly showing what time and daylight have done to the finish.

1966

Fender Jazz Bass

BURGUNDY MIST METALLIC

A detail shot of the CBS neck: it’s bound, has pearl dots, and has medium-jumbo frets.

1966

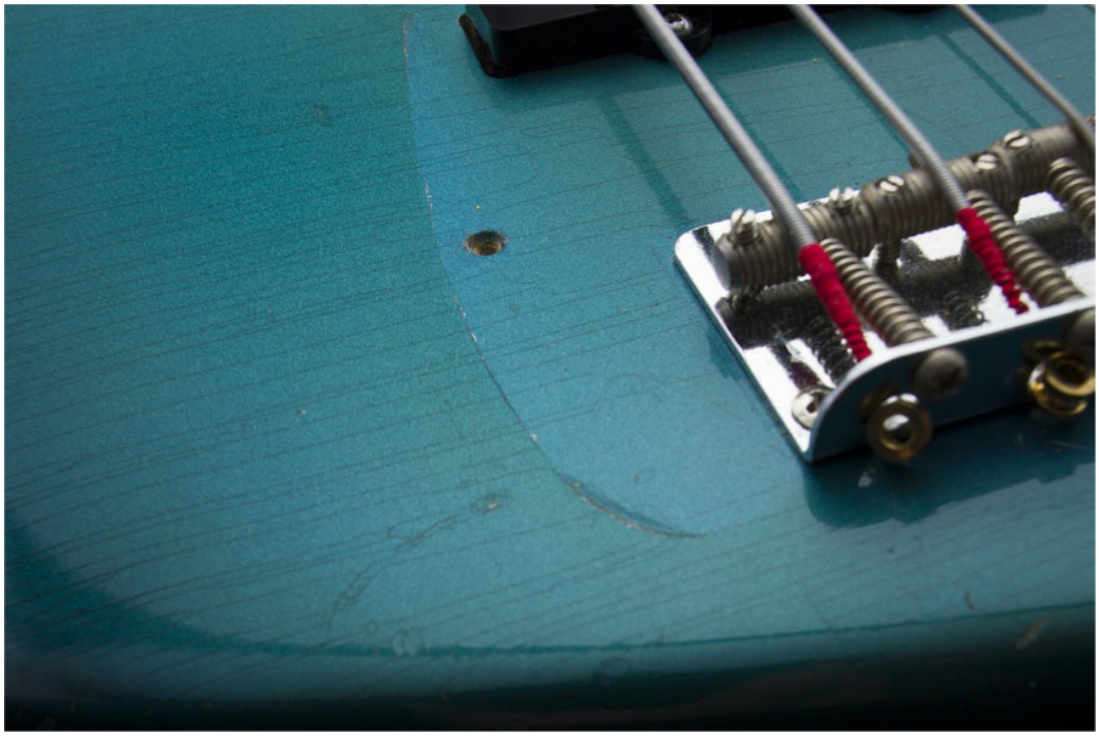
Fender Jazz Bass

SONIC BLUE

1966

Fender Jazz Bass

LAKE PLACID BLUE



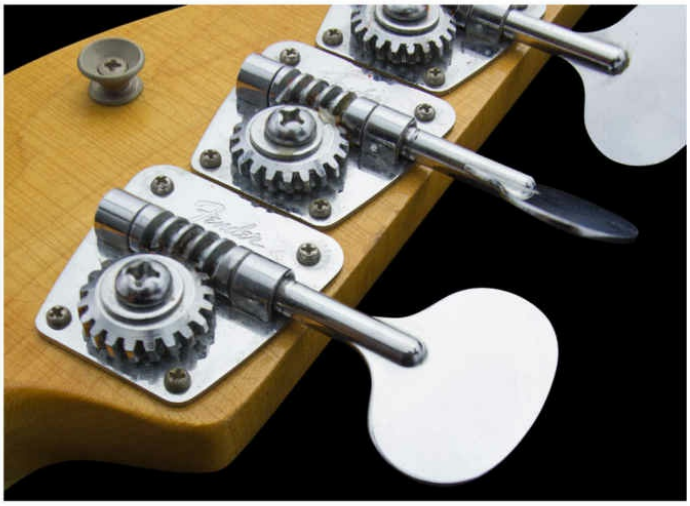
1966

Fender Jazz Bass

FIREMIST GOLD

Here are two beautiful examples of Firemist Gold. The top one came on the road with me in 2015, and I played it on two different songs during the R40

Tour: “Hemispheres: Prelude” and “Working Man.” The bottom one is virtually unplayed, having spent most of its life in its case.



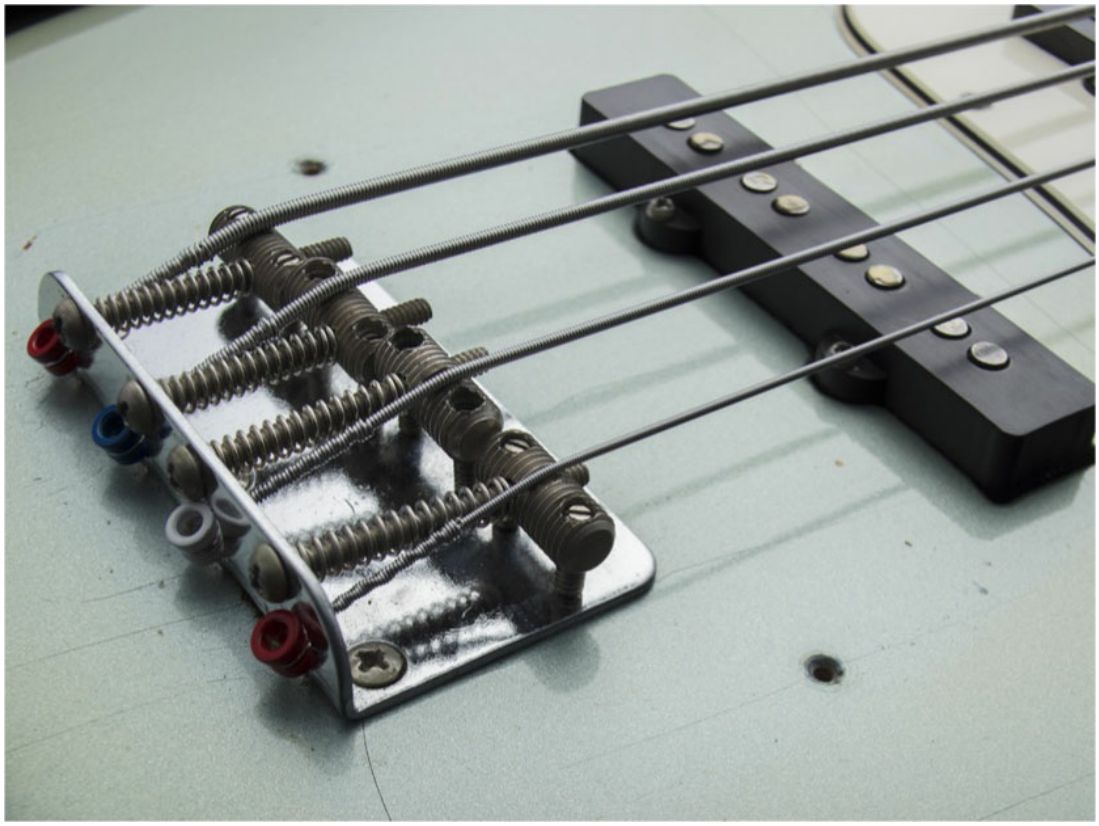
Along with the “paddle” or “lollipop” tuners, which are no longer reverse turning, the Fender logo appears on the reverse mounting plate.

1966

Fender Jazz Bass

BLUE ICE METALLIC

Blue Ice Metallic found its way on to the Fender custom-color charts in 1965, but it remained there for only four years. The color is known to go very green when exposed to sunlight, but, happily, this one has retained much of its icy blueness. Visually, the most immediate thing you notice is the change to the fingerboard. The dots are gone altogether, replaced by large pearloid block markers.



1967

Fender Jazz Bass

CHARCOAL FROST METALLIC

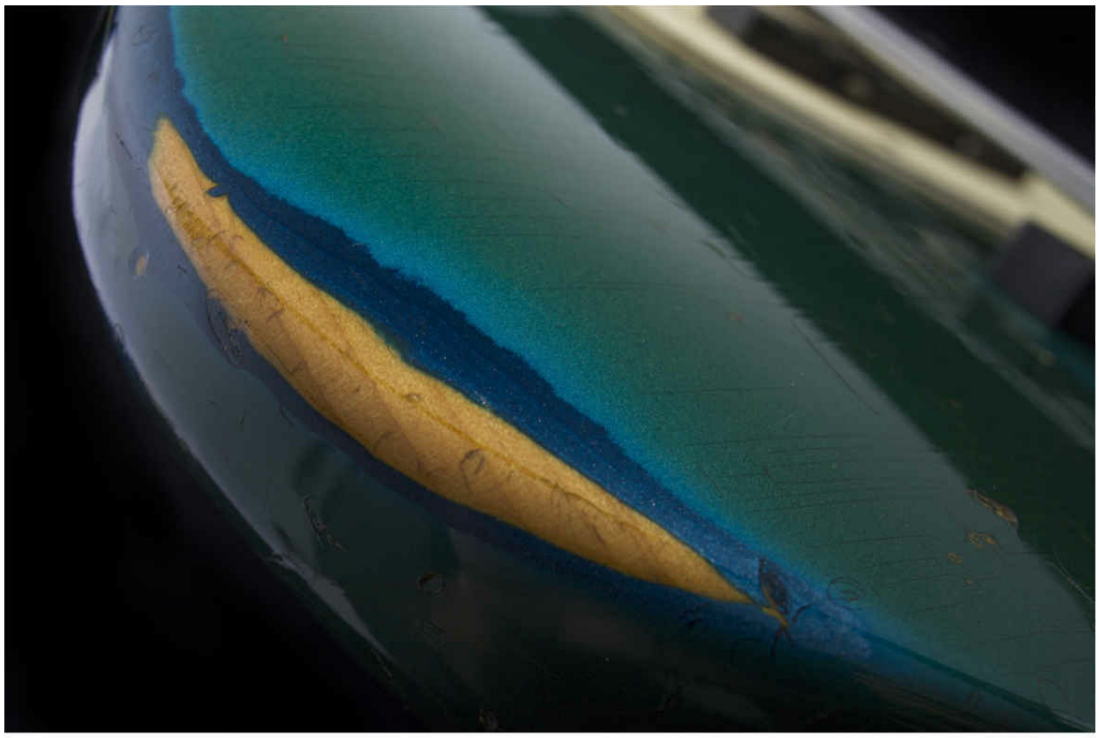
Hello, 1967! Welcome to another year of CBS-introduced colors, including this one: Charcoal Frost Metallic. Like Blue Ice Metallic, it was available only for four years. This is a subtly cool-looking bass, with its not-quite-black hue.

1968

Fender Jazz Bass

LAKE PLACID BLUE

For some reason that I can’t quite figure out, custom-color Jazz Basses from 1968 are *really* hard to find. This is one of only two I’ve ever seen, and it’s gone so green that the shop I bought it from referred to it jokingly (I hope) as “Sherwood Green.”



Fender
JAZZ BASS

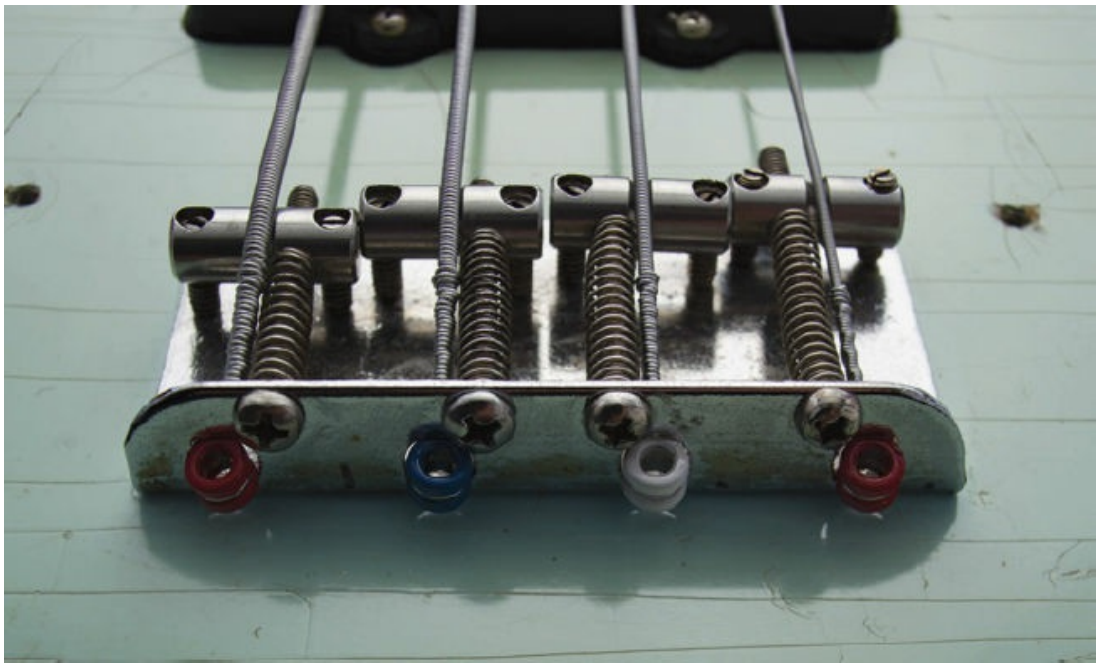
The late 1960s saw the revival of the clover leaf tuners, but featuring the Fender logo.

1969

FENDER JAZZ BASSES

Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose. . . . After almost a decade of small changes, the feel and tone of these ’69s are somewhat different from the earliest models, but the essence of the Jazz Bass remains true to Leo’s concept.

SONIC BLUE



Nerd alert! In late 1969, new barrel saddles with a single groove and the long G intonation screw appeared.

CANDY APPLE RED

Candy Apple . . . copper? This baby's been lying in the sun a little too long. Still, if you didn't know it was *supposed* to be red, you'd think it was a really cool custom color.

OLYMPIC WHITE

1970

FENDER

FRETLESS

JAZZ BASSES

“I don’t play fretlesses all that often, but when I do the sliding sustain and the kind of vibrato that’s required lead me to express different emotions than I could on a fretted bass.”

Fender
JAZZ

LAKE PLACID BLUE
CANDY APPLE RED

It’s rare to find a pair as striking as these two fretless Jazz Basses from 1970. Due to the lack of frets and markers, those long and uninterrupted maple fingerboards have a sleek and super cool look. They were purchased together from the same owner and, although they’re the only ones from this period that I’ve seen, there must be others out there.

THE 1970S ARRIVE . . .

Each with their own personality: ’70 Black, ’71 Lake Placid Blue, ’71 Blonde, and ’71 Black

Determining why a bass sounds the way it does is a tall order. Many factors come into play. It does seem to me—and I think Skully would agree—that while maple-necked instruments do sound brighter and rosewood warmer, these characteristics can’t be attributed 100 percent to the differences in wood. Finish is involved, too: maple has a hard finish, so it’s like playing on a piece of glass, while rosewood is generally left unfinished.

1970

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK

1971

Fender Jazz Bass

LAKE PLACID BLUE

This is the period when the Jazz Bass starts to look like the one I’m most associated with, its main identifying features being the maple neck and black block inlays, which became pretty standard for the early 1970s. Of the three basses that follow, this one is an especially cool combo of Lake Placid Blue and those features.

Fender®

OFFSET
Contour
Body
PATENTED

1972

Fender Jazz Bass

BLONDE

I searched for more than twenty years for a ’72 that sounded like my original Black ’72 Jazz, a.k.a. the Number One. Many came close, but none so close as this, which I found on eBay, of all places. The day it arrived I was in my home studio, about to record some bass tracks on a song called “Territory” for the Canadian alt-rock band Wintersleep. I picked it up and thought, *Oof, this is a heavy bastard*, but when I plugged it in, it sounded so much like my Number One that I used it for the whole session. It worked a treat. I also brought it out on the R40 Tour and featured it on the instrumental track “The Main Monkey Business.” Great bass, this one.

1972

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK

The classic 1972 look, and twin to my original. Here are facts you cannot live without: The bridge pickup has moved 0.4" closer to the bridge, which by now features a shorter G intonation screw.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS SUCH A THING AS WITCHCRAFT

Okay, so: Having set out to discover why my ’72 Jazz Bass sounded the way it did and why it was so hard to find another one exactly like it, what did I learn? What is the takeaway?

I learned why instruments from the pre-CBS years—especially 1962—are so highly regarded and sought after. I learned about the changes that occurred through the takeover years, and what the late 1960s brought or, in some ways, took away from the Jazz Bass. In the early 1970s—particularly 1972—Fender hit on a combination of neck, pickups, and production that created an instrument with a sound that really suited my style of play, but the sound and feel of those ’62 Jazz Basses is all of that and more.

As with most wonderful creations in this world, there’s a moment for all things: when the people and their ideas, their experience, the materials they use, and the atmospheric conditions in which they work, all come together in beautiful and bewitching synchronicity to form something unique. My ’72 Jazz is close to unique, but why are so many ’62 Jazz Basses so good? It seems to me that a period of great production requires the consistency of all those things I just mentioned, in equal measure. Perhaps in ’72 that consistency was short-lived.

Regardless, I believe that all great instruments are a result of this kind of perfect storm . . . waiting to be brought to life by the player lucky enough to hold one in his or

her hands.

It’s witchcraft fashioned by the good witches.

'72 JAZZ BASS
SUNBURST
334198
'72 JAZZ BASS
BLACK (#1)
331155

Interview with

Alan Rogan

Veteran guitar tech for Pete Townshend and the Who, George Harrison, the Rolling Stones, CSNY, Joe Walsh, and too many others to name, as well as blues bassist, mad collector, and inimitable raconteur

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 16, 2017

Alan and me doing our favorite thing: just hangin' out and drooling over instruments!

GEDDY LEE: So tell me about *your* first guitar or bass guitar, when you first got interested, the first one you bought.

ALAN ROGAN: The first one was a Rosetti Lucky Seven guitar I got on my thirteenth birthday. Still have the receipt! Cover and plectrum, too. The Stones and the Beatles got everyone going in England, and then my dad spotted a Höfner Colorama, which I got, a six-string that I played bass on.

GL: So you were always a bass player?

AR: Well, there were too many guys who played guitar way better than me,

so I switched to bass. And, so, like my friend Andy Fairweather Low, and Dave Edmunds, who worked in a shop called Barrett's of Manchester, in the Cardiff branch, I worked in the Newcastle shop as a "Saturday boy." That's where I got my first Fender Precision Bass, a '63, thirty quid! I also bought a Strat, same period in my life. They were nothing then. Same with, we all laughed when these new—what were they called, Gibson Les Somethings, came out in '58, they cost *pshaw*. Now they're worth about fifteen grand! Soon be twenty grand. Anyway, I sold the Fender to get a Gibson bass, to be different, then plugged it in and found out that was a bad move. So I swapped the Gibson bass for a '63 P-Bass, and for some reason I just remember the date I did that—March 1, 1969. Still got that one. I put a set of Rotosounds on, wire ones, perfect. Why mess with perfection?

"The Ox always called me the godfather of his collection. His aim was to get as many custom-colored Jazzes as possible. . . ."

—ALAN ROGAN

GL: So you were always a Fender guy?

AR: By then, yeah. There's only one bass: the P-Bass. And if you want the other sound, get a Jazz Bass.

GL: So Fender started coming into England in the mid-'60s?

AR: Oh no, before then. The embargo ended '58 or '59, but it took a while. So you'd see lots of Blonde Fenders [amps], but we'd get them off US airmen who were based in Germany, because they had the export transformer on, so you had the multi-voltage. Because it was 240—we didn't know the difference—220–240 then, ooh more power! In the last couple of years I noticed an article in one of the guitar "comics," and it said, "Fender Showman was the first bass setup." No it wasn't! It was the 150 for a guitar. As it happens, that's what I used. Until I blew the speaker. Then I had it re-coned and used it as a bass speaker. The Bassman was in the '50s—the 410s—but I think they sussed straight way that it wasn't that good for bass. Guitarists used them, still do.

GL: Yeah, it's meant to be *the* great guitar amp.

AR: In the last twenty or thirty years, the Showman—not the dual, just the

Showman Blonde cab—had a thing Leo invented called the Tone-Ring, and that's the difference.

GL: Really. That's interesting.

AR: The Tone-Ring is the magic sound. How did he know all of this? He couldn't play a note. . . .

GL: But do you have any instruments from back then that you hung on to?

AR: Well, to support the family, many guitars had to go. But I kept the one bass, the '63 bass I got in 1969. I still have that.

GL: When was the first time you actually started to notice the bass in music? When did it first seem like that was something you wanted to do?

AR: Probably Duck. Not so much in blues, although I'm a soul and blues guy. Probably Duck, who luckily for me became a good pal of mine. He always wanted my '59 bass, which looks exactly like his. "So I can retire mine," he'd say. "C'mon, Rogan, gimme the bass!" I'd say, "Go away!" Politely.

GL: 'Cause a lot of those guys just didn't have spare basses.

AR: Nope. You snapped a string and you just got on without it. But being an avid album-sleeve watcher like we all were, you'd see him with a '59 anodized, but with a rosewood fingerboard. I asked him what happened to that, and he said he loaned it to the bass player who was with Otis [Redding], and when he went down in the plane over Wisconsin, he said, "I didn't have the heart to ask his mommy and daddy for the bass back."

GL: How terrible. . . . When did you transition into taking care of instruments for other people?

AR: Early 1970s, I suppose. I'm from the North East. I played in bands, like we all did in our hometowns, but if I wanted to move on up it was move on down to London, so I did. Good thing I did! I went to work for a rental company, and studios in London were the big thing, you know, it was just all-day delivery, then repairing, and that's how you used to put yourself 'round, just by meeting people in the studio and hanging out and going to see everyone play in the nighttime. That was the scene; it was so small then.

GL: So how did you come to work for Pete and the Who?

AR: I got a phone call. I didn't have a clue what I was doing, though I must have looked like I did. I went down to Shepperton Studios, where they were rehearsing, and I started then. Got fired at the end of the first tour, and then waited for the next tour to start and I got a call: "Do you wanna

come back?" It was full tilt, you know, full on, proper angry rock 'n' roll. I worked for Pete and for John. I did all the guitars. And then John and I became firm pals and we used to go out guitar hunting. We'd find outrageous stuff that you just can't anymore, like custom-colored Firebirds and this and that.

GL: So you aided and abetted. . . .

AR: Oh! He always called me the godfather of his collection. His aim was to get as many custom-colored Jazzes as possible, but the prime thing with John was that "they have to play." He'd pick up a bass, and if it was dead, there was no going any further. And then he became a huge guitar collector as well, but he couldn't play guitar.

GL: Well, he didn't have to know how to play guitar, did he? It must have been tough for you when Sotheby's had the sale of his collection after he passed.

AR: Well, I helped set it up. It was for his family, his son. And John's mum was still alive, and his girlfriend, so it was a three-way split.

GL: So you were doing right by him.

AR: John would have wanted it that way. This is how he left it. I was with John the night before, in the Hard Rock bar. . . . We still all miss him because he was so quiet and so funny. He loved who he was, where he was. He'd walk around the house with these P-Basses or Jazz Basses on, playing all the time. John was fanatical about Jazz Basses, before he started getting pointy basses and things that you couldn't reach the G tuner—whatever his last basses were. Then he'd walk into his home bar, where he'd have his stage setup on, and he'd play *real* loud. Well, John couldn't play quietly! *Dumble-dee-dum, deedle-dum, diddly-um, diddle.* . . . Always playing. Apparently Hendrix did, too, walk around the house with his guitar on. John, the same.

Alan's own custom-made Gretsch (inlays, second pickup, original Falcon tailpiece, Gold Sparkle binding, et cetera, done by Clive Brown "to satisfy my love for White Falcons and make a vintage bass that never existed")

GL: And now with the Who, Pino Palladino's a dyed-in-the-wool P-Bass guy, right?

AL: Yeah. And like me, definitely a flatwound guy.

GL: He's got a great sound.

AL: What proved that to me and Pete—we're the only two who don't wear ears on stage—I SAID, WE'RE THE ONLY . . . [*laughs*] At Glastonbury we had side-fills, because the Who always used to have side-fills in the old days, and quiet they were *not*, and at the end of the set Pete put his guitar to one side and went straight over to Pino and said, "It was great!" because we could *hear* Pino, every note. Just brilliant what Pino plays. Of course, he's moved on, so we got this other guy, John Buttons, a really good bass player, nice guy, and he gets more of a John sound than Pino ventured.

GL: When did you start turning into a collector yourself?

AL: When I moved down I had the P-Bass, I had an early 1960s Tele that someone had put a P-90 in. And then I started to swap stuff. By now it was the 1970s and my dream was to get a maple-neck Strat, a maple-neck Tele with a black pickguard. By then I had the anodized-guard P-Bass and I had a Jazz Bass, but a stack knob, ooh! And I got them all in 1976, and I still have them, even my '54 Tele. It's mint condition, and been played a lot.

GL: You love Teles.

AR: I love them a lot. And five hundred dollars then! Now thirty-five grand! The fun was always in the hunt. Not beating people to it, but finding it. It's not the only one in the world, although you find out that some of them are the only one in the world now, twenty, thirty years later.

GL: What do they call it? Guitarchaeology!

AR: [*Laughs*] When the Beatles were doing their *Anthology*, the Rutles came out with *Archaeology*. 'Cause George Harrison always used to say to me, "Alan, if you want to know the true story of the Beatles, watch *The Rutles*." Which he was in, right? In it, Eric Idle says, "The first album took twenty minutes. The second one *even longer*."

GL: [*Laughs*] And speaking of the hunt, what, if anything, do you recall about the origins of the '61 Fender Jazz I bought from you?

AR: Well, my good pal John Porter—he's a record producer, really hot guitar player, played bass as well—he was in Roxy Music. Bryan Ferry and I are from Newcastle and John went to university there, and that's how I've known 'em for fifty years. And when he first saw the bass that you now have, he said, "That used to be Timmy's!" Timmy was the second bass player in the Gas Board, which turned into Roxy Music. *Rare*. . . . Show me another pink bass with stack knobs.

Alan holding his 1959 slab-board sunburst Precision and his ’62 “pink” P-Bass

GL: So, you’ve worked with so many great musicians. How many of them were collectors?

AR: John. Yes . . . Pete—well, they’re tools for him. George, the same. Although all those guys loved the art of it. But John was definitely the first collector I knew—I think at one time on tour I had to buy five road cases, came back with thirty-something instruments. . . .

GL: What memory do you have of John’s Frankenstein bass? Recently I was at the current owner’s house and I got to play it. Firstly, it’s an amazing-sounding bass, and, of course, I was drooling over it for about an hour. Do you remember when he was putting it together?

AR: John was really quiet about all that, but he was always fiddling with

stuff. He didn’t know—well, I won’t say he didn’t know what he was doing, of *course* he did—but there were no barriers, like, “You can’t do that.” There was far less stuff around then, and obviously he had a few bits of basses around, so it was like, “I’ll take that neck, and that pickup’s great. . . .” I’m still like that. A couple of months ago, with the way Pete plays his stage guitars, his Strats, with the Fishman acoustic bridge on, when he bangs the bridge he sometimes tends to knock the back pickup through the plastic pickguard. So I thought, I’m clever here, I’ve got the answer, so I put an anodized pickguard on, and Pete played it when we got back together again for a couple of hours, and he said, “Lemme try the other main guitar,” with the plastic pickguard on, and the sound difference was unbelievable—so, so different. No comparison. But does it affect basses the same? But I’d love to get a later ’59 Jazzmaster, and compare anodized to the, uh . . .

GL: It’s so tricky, eh, when you’re trying to understand why an instrument sounds the way it sounds.

AR: It’s guitar magic. That’s what it is.

Fender Bass:

Outliers and Oddities

Maybe it's unfair to call these instruments "outliers and oddities," but I mean it in an affectionate way. We have the Fender VI, a six-string bass that was used to great effect by John Paul Jones, Jack Bruce, and Glen Campbell; the short scale Mustang Bass, which certainly has transcended its characterization as a "student" bass, distinguishing itself as great sounding and extremely playable in its own right, especially in the hands of such players as Bill Wyman, Tina Weymouth, and Trevor Bolder, to name just a few; and last but not least, the Telecaster Bass, essentially a reissued version of the earliest Precision Bass.

Meanwhile, there's always an oddball in every group; in this case most notably a purely CBS invention, the Bass V, the first five-string electric bass model ever made. (There were already five-string uprights in existence.) Of all these instruments, I've used the Paisley Teles from 1968 the most, particularly in concert settings. I suppose I'm won over by the combination of that early P-Bass sound and the glorious nostalgia the Paisley Teles awaken in me aesthetically—and I know I'm not alone, as Fender keeps reissuing them in various guitar, bass, and amplifier editions. Oh, and speaking of

psychedelia, if I could only find *this* Bass VI that Jack Bruce played back in the day. . . .

Left: Bill Wyman with his Competition Orange Mustang Bass at the Ernst-Merck-Halle in Hamburg, 1970 *(K & K Ulf Kruger OHG/Redferns) Right:* Jack Bruce rehearses backstage of the Murray the K Show on March 31, 1967, in NYC *(Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images)*

1962

Fender Bass VI

BLONDE

The Bass VI made its debut in the 1961 Fender catalog, where it was simply called “New Six-String Bass Guitar.” This ’62, replete with all the earliest features, has the look of the Jaguar, though it predates that instrument by a year. Its narrow 21-fret neck was strung with heavy-gauge strings tuned to E-A-D-G-B-E, like a guitar but an octave lower.

Fender
PAT. # 2,932,923

These early 1962 features didn’t last long. Around each pickup there are fine chrome surrounds, which disappeared the following year; a rosewood “slab” fingerboard, replaced in ’63 by a rosewood veneer; and a triple-switch pickup control plate—this too was modified the following year when Fender added a bass cut or “strangle” slider switch—and last but not least, foam mutes were added to the bridge assembly in 1963.

ROAMING THE RANGE

In 1961, Fender offered its first and only extended-range model: the Bass VI. Five years earlier, Danelectro had introduced its own six-string bass, the UB-2, which was gaining popularity in the recording world, as the trend at that time was to double with acoustic basses, creating the “tic-tac” style so distinctive to the Nashville sound, and would feature prominently in Jack Nitzsche’s 1963 hit, “The Lonely Surfer.” (Interestingly, on *The Smothers Brothers Show* later in the decade, Glen Campbell mimes the solo on “Wichita Lineman” with a Fiesta Red Fender Bass VI, but that song had also been recorded with the Danelectro.)

When you dig around a little, you can be surprised to find how other more notable musicians have played the Bass VI: John Paul Jones, Jet Harris (former Shadows bassist), Rick Danko, John Entwistle, Noel Redding, Robert Smith, Joe Perry, George Harrison, Peter Green . . . and let's not forget Nigel Tufnel.

1965

Fender Bass V

CANDY APPLE RED

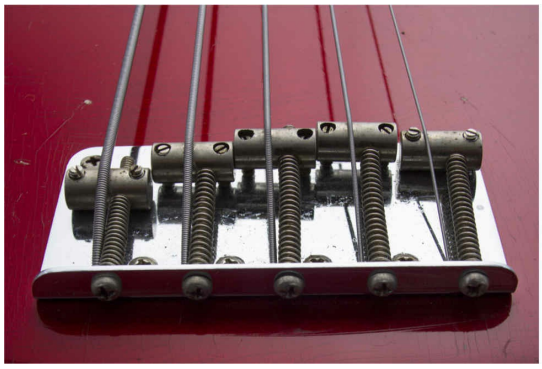
Bass Vs are more curiosity to collectors than practical to players. Although this invention of the CBS R&D (research and development) crew was a pioneering breakthrough of sorts, being the first five-string electric bass, it was not a success. Appearance-wise, with its distended body and headstock but short fifteen-fret neck, it's an awkward-looking creature—as if, in Terry Foster's words, "it's missing a chromosome."

1967

Fender Bass V

BLONDE

Here’s a one-off custom order from 1967, with Blonde finish and unique maple neck. The Bass V was the first instrument discontinued by Fender; leftover bodies were repurposed to create the Swinger/Musiclander.



This bridge gives me the creeps. It’s like looking at a hand with a sixth finger!

It got weird! Note that the Bass V isn’t short scale. It has an extra-long body to retain a standard 34" scale, but with only fifteen frets. The idea was that a player’s fingers wouldn’t have to roam so far along the neck to reach a range of notes, but could step up conveniently to the added high C string instead. (The highest note on a Bass V is the same as on a P-Bass or a Jazz.) In practice, musicians found the five strings too close together and, for most intents and purposes, redundant. Less than two hundred were made from 1965 to 1970, when it was finally discontinued.

1966

Fender Mustang Bass

BLUE

Too cool for school. The Mustang guitar came out in 1964, and the bass joined it in 1966—the last Leo designed before leaving the Fender factory, but released later by CBS. These 30"-scale Mustang Basses were designed as part of Fender’s successful line of student instruments (alongside the Musicmaster and the Duo-Sonics), but the word “student” belies just how cool they are with their three-ply pearloid pickguards and hardware reminiscent of contemporary Jazz Basses, and just how professional.

Mustangs, like Precisions, had a single split-coil pickup. Their knobs, control plate, and lollipop tuners are reminiscent of the Jazz Basses of the day. The early bodies were made of alder and featured three-ply pearloid pickguards (except the white ones, which had tortoise). Also seen here are the still-intact Mustang mutes.

There was no dedicated “Mustang Bass” decal design as of the mid-1960s. As seen in this photograph, Fender added the word “Bass,” taken from a spare batch of Bass V decals.

Fender
MUSTANG BASS

1969

Fender Mustang Bass

COMPETITION BURGUNDY

As a player, I never took student instruments very seriously. Turns out I did Mustangs a disservice, because they’re well made, they sound good and punchy, and their short scale makes them easy and fun to play. Certainly the best value for money of any student guitar I know.

Fender MUSTANG BASS

Fender MUSTANG BASS

1969

Fender Mustang Bass

COMPETITION ORANGE

For a time, Bill Wyman played a 1969 Competition Orange Mustang with its signature red racing stripes, like the pristine example shown above beside its sibling, a super cool and rare Competition Burgundy. Today, they've both become extremely desirable and surprisingly hard to find in good condition. They're trending!

1968

Fender Telecaster Basses

PINK PAISLEY

Of these two “groovy” 1968 Telecasters, the one on the right was among the first vintage basses I acquired for my collection. The Tele Bass was a

throwback—a reissue, in fact, of the 1952 Precision, maple neck and all. But the overlay of the paisley and blue flower wallpaper makes them special, even if it was a marketing ploy to exploit hippie psychedelia. Well, it worked, because their fab look reminds me of growing up through that period, when I fancied myself a bit of a weekend hippie. In 1968, when I wasn't washing dishes at the Cabbage Roll in Toronto's hippie haven, Yorkville Village, I could be found sittin' cross-legged on the floor at home burnin' incense (among other things) and spinnin' Cream's *Wheels of Fire*, Jefferson Airplane's *Crown of Creation*, Pink Floyd's *A Saucerful of Secrets*, *The Seeds*, Jimi's *Electric Ladyland*, and the Grateful Dead's *Anthem of the Sun*. (I mean, who back then didn't dig a Dead jam?)

In 1968, Fender promoted the bass this way: "Paisley Red pulsates with every beat and swirls in a blinding carousel of colors and forms." Yeah, baby! They're still so groovy that I chose to play both of them on the R40 Tour as part of our closing back-in-time medley—on "Lakeside Park" and "Anthem." Alex simultaneously played a matching Pink Paisley Telecaster Guitar.

Fender®
TELECASTER BASS
PAT. 2,968,204

Actual wallpaper was glued onto the top and back of these ash slab bodies. The rest was painted either pink or gold.

1968

Fender Telecaster Bass

CANDY APPLE RED

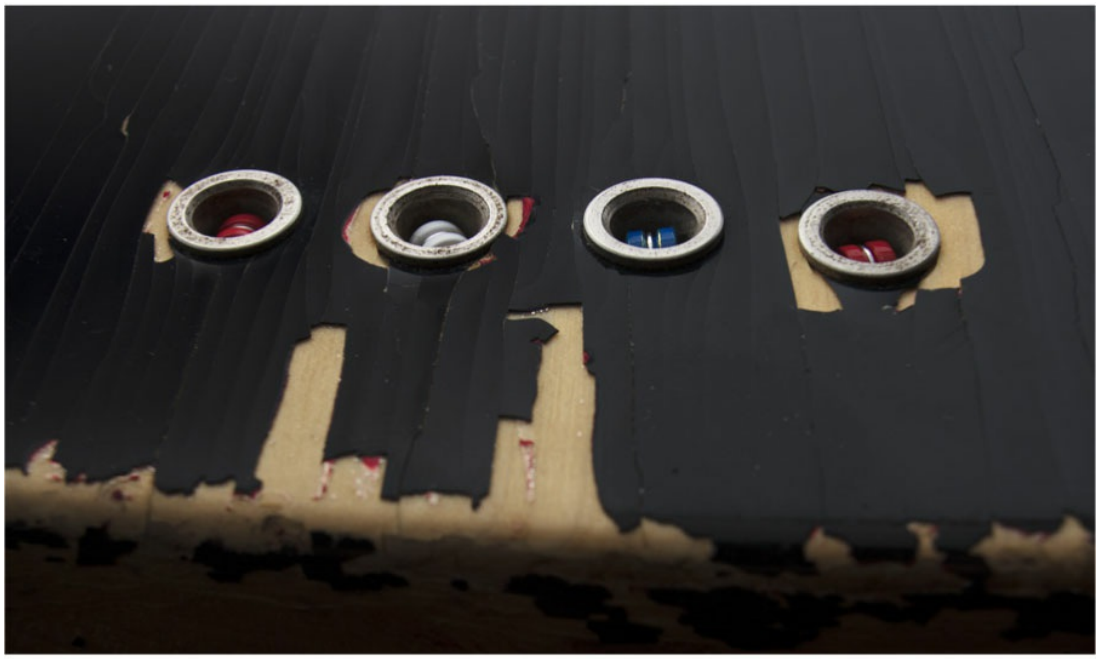
Look, I’m a sucker for custom colors, and I love this big slab body in edible Candy Apple Red. It’s pretty hard to find this model in this color.

1969

Fender Telecaster Bass

BLACK

Fender made the Paisley and Blue Flower models only for about a year, and it had some bodies left over. So, what did the thrifty company do? As we've seen so often with various manufacturers, nothing of use was ever discarded. This instrument had evidently been prepped to be a Paisley, but was then painted over in black, and you can still see traces of pink underneath—the last vestiges of the Summer of Love.



I guess this was Jimi’s bass, right?

1967

Fender Coronado II Bass

CHERRY RED BURST

I would be remiss in this collection to overlook the only hollow-body bass that Fender produced in the 1960s—an instrument that, in my view, is truly an outlier in terms of what Fender was known for. The thinline Coronado was decidedly a CBS idea: as Terry Foster has written, it was “the first time Fender appeared to be chasing after their main rival, Gibson.” This was, in other words, Fender’s version of the EB-2.

Roger Rossmeisl came to work for Leo Fender from Rickenbacker in 1962 to help develop an acoustic line of instruments. Roger brought along his aesthetic sensibility and a love for details such as the checkerboard binding seen on this ’67 Lake Placid Blue Coronado Guitar (below, left) and the striking color mix on the finish of this Coronado Bass (below, right).

The near-mint example seen here possesses some features that are unusual for Fender: a semi-transparent Cherry finish bursting with Candy Apple Red on the edges of the top and back of its lightweight body; solid Candy Apple sides; and two DeArmond pickups, which were produced for Fender. Coronado basses and guitars have made a resurgence in the alt-rock world—most notably, I've seen the bass version in the hands of Colin Greenwood and Thom Yorke of Radiohead, one of my favorite bands.

Interview with

John Paul Jones

Multi-instrumentalist and founding member of Led Zeppelin and Them Crooked Vultures, renowned session musician, arranger, composer, and record producer

LONDON, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2017

John with his Dallas Tuxedo and his immortal ’62 Jazz Bass

GEDDY LEE: When did you first become aware of bass in music?

JOHN PAUL JONES: My family were in variety, vaudeville, and I used to travel around with them. They had a musical comedy act where my father was a pianist and my mother was the singer in an evening gown, and when she’d start the song my father was the screw-up pianist: everything would go wrong and she’d never get through the song. When I was thirteen, fourteen, they played seasons at seaside resorts like Ramsgate, where they had those big Ami jukeboxes. I was walking along the pier and suddenly I heard “Shakin’ All Over” by Johnny Kidd and the

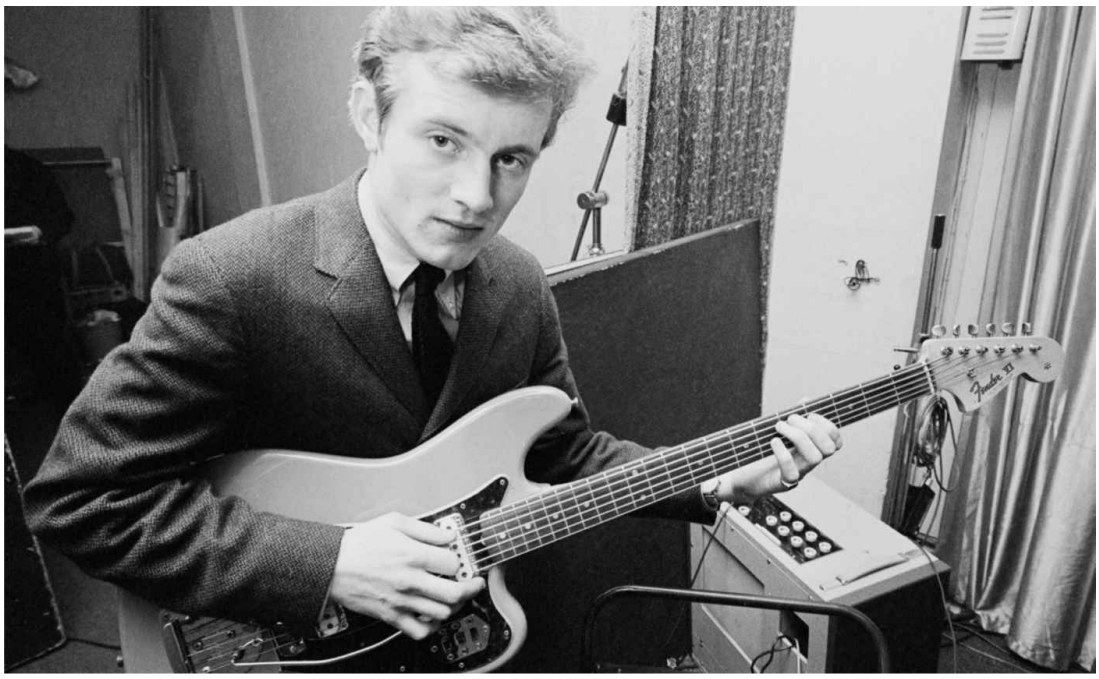
Pirates. I heard *boom-bum-bum-boom-boom-buh-buh*, and I went, “Ooh, that’s a great noise! How did they do that?” And there was “Apache” by the Shadows. Not that much bass on it, but the jukeboxes had a lot of bass on them, and they played it loud, along the seaside at night with the lights.

GL: What a great image . . .

JPJ: I was an Everly Brothers fan at the time, and they covered “Lucille,” which was another steaming bass riff, and that did it for me. When I was ten, I saw *Rock Around the Clock* on tour with my parents. I saw it with a bunch of showgirls; that was fantastic! But I *hated* it, because there was this promise of rock ’n’ roll but then all these old guys turned up playing country swing! The first record I bought was “Great Balls of Fire,” Jerry Lee Lewis, which had that hard, straight-driving sound I wanted. Plus, I’d heard Ray Charles by then; the whole rhythm-and-blues thing took me. I never liked Elvis much, mainly because he had that slightly cheesy backing. My father thought he was fantastic; he’d say, “He’s got great rhythm in his voice!” and you know, when your *dad* likes something, you don’t like it so much.

GL: That’s true, ’cause my mom loved Elvis, and I wasn’t an Elvis guy. So you came from a musical family and were playing instruments from a very young age?

JPJ: Very young, yeah. I played piano and ukulele and a little bit of organ, but I used to bunk off school a lot, and in the window of a small shop in Soho there was a Fiesta Red Precision Bass, and I used to just go up and stare at it. How stupid was that! Just stare at it for five, ten minutes, then go home and dream about it. I used to draw it at school, just obsessed. I said to my dad, “I really want a bass guitar.” He went, “To be honest, the bass guitar is a novelty instrument. A couple of years, and nobody will ever have heard of one. Take up the saxophone and you’ll always work.” But I insisted, and he relented. By then I was playing organ in the local church, and the money I got paid for the bass guitar in weekly installments. But all I could afford was this one here.



JPJ in his early session days, recording his 1965 solo single "Baja"
(Mark and Colleen Hayward/Redferns)

GL: Oh, my god, look at that. A Dallas Tuxedo! The same bass Bill Wyman constructed his homemade fretless out of.

JPJ: It's made out of one piece of wood.

GL: Where did you find it?

JPJ: Garland's Electrical Shop and Musical Instruments, in South London, New Cross. It sold radios, washing machines, and a couple of guitars.

GL: Do you recall what other brands you'd see in the shops back then?

JPJ: Well, Rosetti was the other, cheaper one, a semiacoustic, which I tried, and I thought, "This is so awful!" The German ones, too, the Höfners, but I never liked them either. They sounded so woolly. And I never liked Gibson basses either, for the same reason. All the Liverpool bands had Gibson basses, and you'd be behind the stage on a tour and all you'd hear was *wooob-wooob-wooob*. I hated them. I was a Fender man by then. What else was there . . . Fenton-Weill. . . . There were Gibsons. I *do* have a Gibson "violin" bass, actually, which I got in the 1970s.

GL: And I've seen a picture of you playing a cherry-red Gibson EB-2.

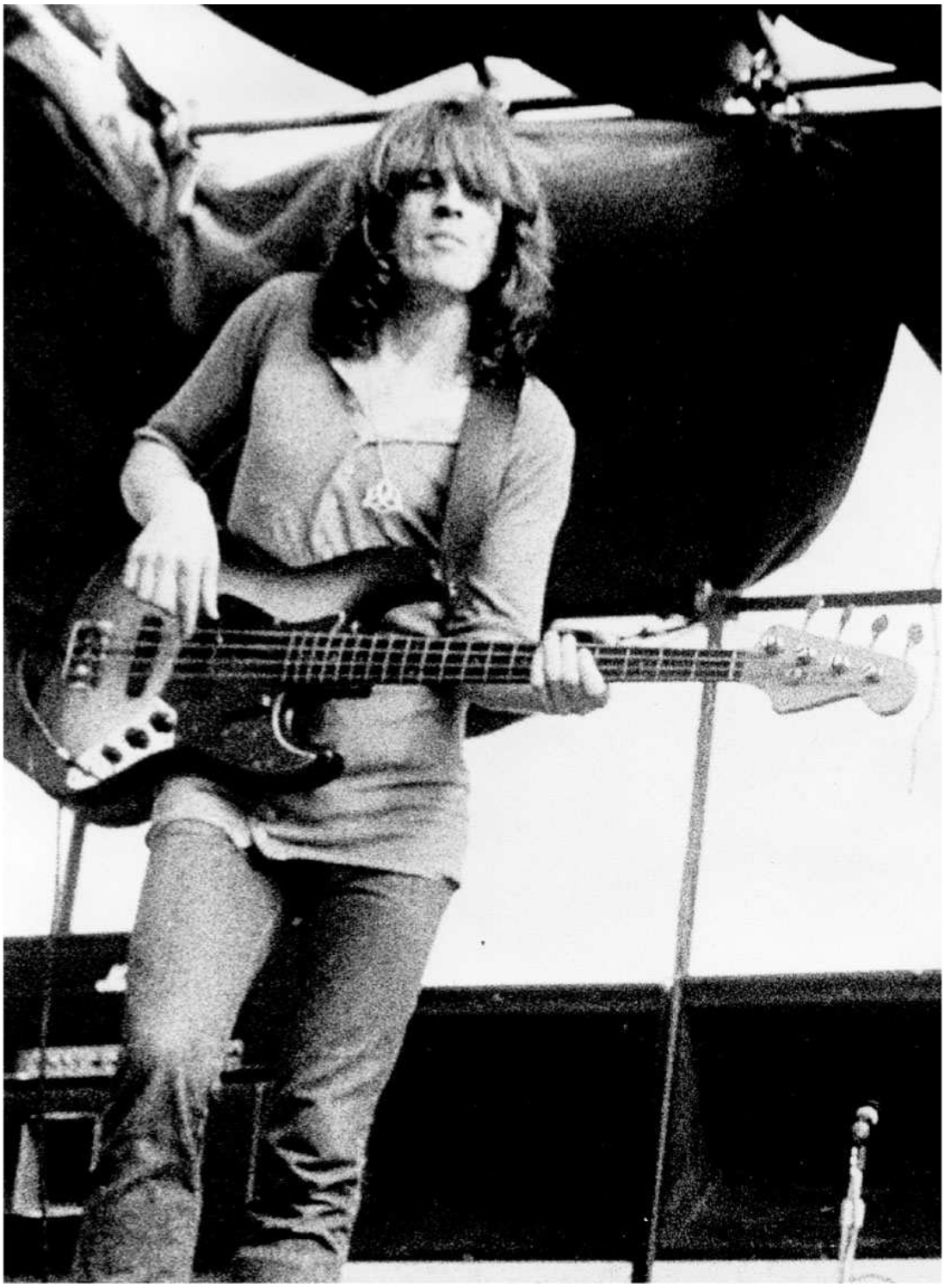
JPJ: The semi-acoustic? Oh yeah, I got that only a few years ago.

GL: I used to love the sound that Jack Bruce got out of his EB-3, but he really

cranked up the distortion.

JPJ: Jack Bruce! I remember going up the steps into EMI on Abbey Road one day with my Jazz Bass, and he was coming out with his upright, and he said, "'Ow you doin', John? Still playing that old *plank*, are you? You'll never get *me* playing on one of those!'"

GL: [*Laughs*] But rewinding to when you were still in school. . . . Did you have any bass heroes? Guys you looked up to?



JPJ performing live with Zep, circa late 1960s/early 1970s *(Charlie Gillett Collection/Redferns)*

JPJ: By the time I was fifteen, I'd been in a sort of rhythm-and-blues group,

and the keyboard player's dad or uncle was American, and was in the services, and had all these American records, which filtered down to us. That's how I discovered Booker T. and the MGs, all of those people. So I was playing organ as well in some bands. Duck Dunn was a hero. And of course, when Motown hit, James Jamerson. And Carol Kaye. I was a big fan of [Charles] Mingus by then, too. My dad used to call me Mingus: "Go on, Mingus!"

GL: That's a good nickname to have! And were you already part of a larger community of musicians?

JPJ: I left school at sixteen. I was doing gigs, US Air Force bases, and stuff like that, which was an education. There was one awful RAF place called Chicksands, where if you wanted to go home early, you'd play Duane Eddy's "Theme from Dixie," and all of a sudden the southerners would stand up and salute and all the Yankees would throw chairs at them, and the whole thing would end up with a knock-down, drag-out fight, and then the local sergeant would say to us, "I think you guys had better go." And we'd be, "Okay, thanks. Bye!" Anyway, then my dad said, "I know someone who could get you a job. There's a clerk in a tea and coffee importer. . . ." That led to me looking for work. I'd come up every morning to Archer Street, just off Shaftesbury Avenue, a short street in the back of the Windmill where all the London musicians would congregate on the corner and see who could get work, and I just badgered people. And one Monday morning I saw Jet Harris from the Shadows, who had a single called "The Man with the Golden Arm." I knew he was forming a band to go out on the road, so I walked up to him—I was seventeen—and I said, "D'you wanna bass player?" And I ended up going out on the road with him and Tony Meehan when they had that single "Diamonds."

GL: And you were playing which bass by then?

JPJ: My one and only '62 Fender Jazz, which I'd bought brand-new for £250 at Len Styles Music Shop in Lewisham. Tony was also producing records at that time, and he said, "Can you do some sessions for me?" I did, and word got around quick. In those days, there was no specialism in sessions like in America, where you'd have the Wrecking Crew, who'd mainly do what they did, and Motown players would always do Motown tunes. In England, you'd just get booked, you'd show up, you'd play your three hours, your two tracks, three sometimes, and you'd go on to the next

session. You'd walk in and it could be a sixty-piece big band swing session, it could be a country session, a reggae session, rhythm and blues, Motown, straight pop, *anything*. You wouldn't know until you came through the door—'til they counted you in, in fact. You wouldn't know who the artist was a lot of the time. Then you'd see them there, Tom Jones or whoever.

GL: But that must have been so good for honing skills. Improvisational skills, language skills . . .

JPJ: Oh *yeah*. Everything. It also teaches you discipline. Page and I, both being session musicians, knew if you book a session you turn up on time, or else you don't work again. And we ran the early days of Zeppelin just like that. You'd rehearse before you got into the studio. You'd never go in and say, "Oo-er, what shall we do?" But anyway . . . one day, Andrew Loog Oldham said, "Can you do arrangements?" I said, "Sure!" and then I went to the library and got a book out on arranging. And my dad gave me a couple of tips as well. In those days in England everyone wanted to make American-sounding records, and I became the Motown/Stax cover band, which gave me a huge amount of work because all the other bass players were a generation older and didn't listen to any of that stuff. When they wanted a cover, a "Motown song," it was always like, "Oh, I'll call John and just get him to do it—whatever it is he does!"

GL: That really does sound like a young age to be doing that sort of work. . . .

JPJ: The closest to my age was Jimmy, who was a couple of years older. Arranging was my second career, so by the time I was eighteen, I'd given up the road!

GL: So, that's about the period when we find you playing a Bass VI. Do you remember it?

JPJ: I do! I borrowed it for my first single, "Baja," which was a Jack Nitzsche surf tune. Andy White was on drums—the Scottish drummer on "Love Me Do," because they didn't trust Ringo, he was too new.

GL: Was that the only bass you played on the track? It looks like a really early one, like a '62.

JPJ: Yeah, it was. Fiesta Red.

GL: Do you consider yourself a collector of basses?

JPJ: I have a couple.

GL: So really they were tools for you?

JPJ: In Zeppelin I bought them as I needed them. I used that Fender probably

half of Zeppelin. Then as we got bigger I got a ’51 Precision, precontour body. You know how you go into the dressing room after a show and find that somebody’s laid out a bunch of guitars to sell you? So I went in one time and there was this *thing* in the corner. The whole thing was puce, and I mean the whole thing; somebody had dipped the whole thing in a vat of it, so the fingerboard, everything, was covered in this auberginey, puce color, which was just awful. But I thought, there’s a very interesting instrument under all of that, and it turned out to be a ’51 Precision. I had Henry “the Horse” Smith scrape it all off for me, and I used it on “Black Dog.” It had that real harsh twang. Great-sounding instrument. So that was *two* basses I had! After a while I got this Hagstrom, but it was horrible, a truly awful instrument, and so on one tour or another somebody told me about a guy working for Alembic, Rick Turner, and I went up to the workshop on the chicken farm in Petaluma in California, and I saw this instrument with palm trees and shells and mermaids and abalone on it, and I bought it! It sounded terrific, although Page said, “I’m not playing to *that*,” because it had an *immense* sound. But then we used it for *The Song Remains the Same*.

GL: And that was your first instrument with active electronics?

JPJ: Yes. But whilst I was there, Turner said, “I can make you a really good bass,” so he made me the Alembic that I then used. That was mid-1970s. That was the one that everybody complains about now, because they listen to the bootlegs, and of course the bootlegs all came from the console, so all they’re listening to is the top end of the stereo going through.

GL: So they’re not getting any of the vibe. Yeah, people always say, “Why don’t you release more board tapes?” and it’s because they’re half the sound.

JPJ: So by then I’d also got a Precision fretless with a maple neck, which I used for “In My Time of Dying.”

GL: The first time I saw you guys play was in 1969 at the Masonic Temple in Toronto, the Rockpile. It was a September day they called Mighty Monday, a legendary day in Toronto rock history! I think you opened with “Train Kept A-Rollin’”. . . .

JPJ: It was the first song we *ever* did, in rehearsal. Legend has it that it was in Wardour Street, but it wasn’t. It was underneath an illegal record import business. There was room downstairs, which I think they’d just

cleared out before a raid or something. And I met Robert and Bonzo there for the first time. Page said, "What shall we play? D'you know 'Train Kept A-Rollin'?" and I was, "Uh, no . . ." He says, "It's a twelve-bar. Count it in!" and that was it, and the room exploded. I'd discovered Bonzo! I thought, "Wow, I can work with this guy!" And he'd heard there was a session bass player coming in, and was expecting some chap with a pipe and patches on his elbows.

GL: So many of your bass lines have become iconic—"How Many More Times," "Ramble On," "The Lemon Song," and you mentioned "Black Dog"—many of them were heavily riff oriented. Did they begin as bass riffs or guitar riffs? Did you guys use to work together on those parts?

JPJ: We usually came in with our own stuff and then worked on them together. "How Many More Times" was a Yardbirds song, so that was already there, but "Ramble On," Page just started playing the chords and I came up with a melodic line. There's another melodic one, isn't there . . . [*hums the bass line*] I can't remember the name. . . .

GL: "What Is and What Should Never Be"?

JPJ: Thank you! I'm afraid Zeppelin isn't my specialist subject! Then, "Black Dog" I wrote on a train coming home from rehearsal, when we were rehearsing out at Page's place in Berkshire. My dad had taught me a basic system of writing music on anything, using numbers—one is the root, two is the second, three is the third. You'd put little pluses and minuses for flats and sharps, and then just use the note for the rhythm: you can put it underneath. There was a riff on Howlin' Wolf's electric album that I liked because it kept going 'round; it never ended where you thought it would. So I wrote a riff that did that, on a train ticket.

GL: Did you lay all your tracks in Zep live off the floor?

JPJ: Yep, always. And then overdubs and vocals afterwards. Sometimes guide vocals early. The old school. And so after your first week in the studio you'd have five, six tracks, which sounded great! When I produce a record—rock or even country—I try to make sure I do that, so that at the end of the week everybody feels great having so much stuff down. Then you can relax and get creative.

GL: Would you guys use a click track in those days, or was it just feel?

JPJ: No. I remember hearing a cover of "Stairway to Heaven" by an American group called Great White. They'd obviously used a click track, and by the end of it you'd lost the will to live. Because the real version

sped up. Which is a musical dynamic. Acceleration is a musical dynamic! And it needed to speed up!

GL: [*Laughs*] So Dad warned you that the electric bass was just a novelty. What would you say in retrospect the electric bass actually did for music?

JPJ: I always thought Bach would have loved the electric bass. It's more of a melodic instrument than an upright, which is more of a rhythm instrument, really. The bass line, obviously, it *is* rhythm, but you gotta support the singer; harmonically and melodically. And, obviously, if you're in a three-piece band and somebody solos, there's only two of you left! I don't think the upright bass never made *that* much of a difference.

John holding his Dallas Tuxedo

2

Gibson and Epiphone

showma
10
exciting
custom
colors

Jack Bruce with Cream at Madison Square Garden in New York, 1968 *(Michael Ochs/Getty Images)*

I approach Gibson instruments as a kind of newbie—even though Gibsons have always been around me in one way or another. One of my earliest, deepest influences was Jack Bruce, and the man who proudly wreaked such havoc on his EB-3 remains a hero of mine. I remember, like it was yesterday, seeing Cream at Massey Hall in Toronto on June 5, 1968, watching him grind and wind his way through those blues-based songs with that great combo of bottom-end boom and distorted Marshall amp fuzz. He was a virtuoso of complexity, yet bluesy and melodic. I loved the way he sounded in the context of that band; in that hot moment, he was everything to me. He was a bold player and I was drawn to the bold. Still, in the course of my own career, I had no interest in playing Gibsons, because they didn't fit into the soundscape I envisioned for myself. The tone I was developing had a lot of twang and a punchy mid-bottom, and Gibsons, fine as they looked, did not do that for me sonically.

Fast-forward to today, and it's a different story. When I plugged in a few of the EB hollow- and solid-bodied basses I'd found in my searches, I was amazed by the thunder. The amount of sheer low end coming from those old Gibson pickups is astounding, and I have since developed quite a crush on them. The more I learn, the more I admire the craftsmanship and supertraditional look of the EB-2s—those "Mickey Mouse" ears and contours, which partner so beautifully with their guitar siblings, the iconic and fabulous ES-335, 345, and 355 thinline guitars. I've also come to really dig those Dark Cherry EB-0s and EB-3s from the 1960s, with their supercool dual-horned SG-like styling. Put them in a group, and they stand like a herd of short scale bison.

Not being steeped in Gibson all my life, I leaned on my pal Colin Cripps for some background info and cool anecdotes. Colin's played with innumerable Canadian musicians, from Blue Rodeo and Bryan Adams to his own C&C Surf Factory, and has been collecting, trading, and loving vintage instruments since he was a kid. He's a veritable font of information, and I'm indebted to him for many of this chapter's keener insights.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GIBSON

Gibson was well established long before the advent of the electric age, having made fine acoustic instruments since 1902. Even well before the 1930s, when everyone was experimenting with pickups on banjos, Hawaiian guitars, upright basses, and so on, an in-house engineer named Lloyd Loar had already developed one for the viola. Nevertheless, into the 1950s the company was still tradition minded, and it was mainly known for their jazz guitars. Gibson was *evolutionary* rather than *revolutionary*, the way Fender was.

Gibson was always about fine craftsmanship, and when I pick up one of those instruments, I immediately think of the tradition of luthiers. It speaks to the region around Kalamazoo, Michigan, where Gibson was based until 1973. That area was a manufacturing mecca, containing a heavy immigrant population of highly skilled European woodworkers since the start of the twentieth century; in fact, Grand Rapids is still called "Furniture City."

My pal Colin hanging around with two Gibson beauties from my

collection of not-basses: early ’60 Cherry ES-335 (left) and ’64 Polaris White Firebird 1

STORY OF WINE
EDOUARD VUILLARD
A Vanished World
ATLAS

“People don’t think about that,” Colin Cripps says. “In Southern California, Fender was surrounded by orange groves and fruit farms, so their workforce was general labor. But Gibson employed guitar builders with a range of skills to craft beautiful instruments in the best possible way. Just look at the shape of them.”

Gibson’s electric story starts post–World War II with Ted McCarty, this young maverick who’d worked his way through the ranks at the Wurlitzer company and wanted to launch Gibson into the future. He came from sales and marketing, listening to feedback from musicians *and* music stores, so you could say he was a counterpart to Don Randall at Fender.

It seems ironic to me that while McCarty wanted to take the company into the future, his first bass guitar, the EB (for “Electric Bass”), was shaped like a violin, and his second, the EB-2, was a semi-acoustic arch top. Both instruments were steeped in tradition. But with rock ’n’ roll kicking into gear by the end of the 1950s, Gibson decided it was time for a bass to pair with its more modern Les Paul Junior; the EB-0, with its short scale, almost looks like a student model, evidence that Gibson was looking for younger players. In 1961, the company redesigned it to resemble the double-cut Gibson SG, and introduced the two-pickup EB-3—and it’s the image of *that* instrument, in the hands of the great Jack Bruce, that’s indelibly printed in my mind.

The Gibson Bass Banjo

—"*The Noblest Instrument of Them All*"

Because of its unusual size and striking appearance the new Gibson Bass Banjo compels instant attention, wherever used — and when the majestic tones of its deep, powerful voice boom out none can resist its magic spell.

Never before has a bass banjo of this type been considered as a practical possibility — yet the skill and wisdom of Gibson Craftsmen have found the way to build such an instrument, one that is not only practical but practically indispensable in banjo bands, either small or large.

Few instruments can yield greater pleasure to either player or audience than this great bass. For real rhythm it has no substitute. Its foundation tones form a rich carpet upon which to spread the melodic voices of the higher pitched instruments.

Beautifully finished in ivory with solid pearloid peg head inlaid with vari-colored rhinestones. Specially selected white calfskin head. All metal parts finished in glistening gun metal.

The New Gibson Bass Banjo is tuned and played the same as the mando-bass—G-D-A-E.

The young lady playing the bass banjo illustrated here is a member of Miss Jean Rankins' famous all-girl orchestra known as "The Blue Belles." The orchestra is considered one of the top-notchers in vaudeville.

Famous orchestra leaders welcome the new Gibson Bass Banjo

Page 31

A Gibson ad from the 1930s

All of this set the stage for the boldness and futuristic look of Gibson's

Thunderbirds, and even though they were unappreciated in their day, they've become more desirable with every passing year to players and collectors alike. I hope that, like me, when you look at the entire range of Gibson basses in the upcoming pages, you'll be impressed by the way they embody both the old and the bold, two very different sides of a company, but a testament to the enduring craftsmanship at its core.

Gibson

Short Scale

Solid Body

“Once Cream started to happen, I wanted to find something that had a very particular kind of distorted sound, and that I could bend strings on, because I wanted to play it like a guitar—and the EB-3 was perfect for that.”

—JACK BRUCE

1953

Gibson EB

MAHOGANY

In 1953, Gibson introduced what it simply called the “Electric Bass.” (The company started referring to it as the EB-1 following the release of the EB-2 in 1958.) Aware that the Precision Bass was already out there, Gibson gave players an additional option with the EB-1: hold it or stand it up on a pin.

Leslie West and Felix Pappalardi of Mountain, circa 1970 *(Michael Ochs/Getty Images)*

It’s thought that just over one hundred EBs were made and shipped in its first year. The first time I ever laid my ears on one was in the hands of Felix Pappalardi, Mountain’s bassist and, of course, producer of one of my favorite bands of all time, Cream (his was actually a later, 1968, reissue). I always dug the way he got such a heavy, deep, more than slightly distorted sound out of his EB-1 on such songs as “Theme for an Imaginary Western” and “For Yasgur’s Farm.” It’s kind of ironic that Pappalardi and Paul McCartney, both such important icons of rock and pop, are identified with instruments shaped like they belong in a classical orchestra.

Gibson

The EB had a scale length of 30.5" (compared with Fender’s first P-Bass, which was 34"), constructed of solid mahogany-stained brown, with a machine-carved top and a twenty-fret mahogany set-neck. At the time, this would have set you back around $235 (case extra).

Check out the angled-back headstock, which proved problematic.

The tilt made for a weak spot where the wood grain runs out. If the instrument fell or was not securely transported, the headstock took the brunt of the blow and could easily crack or break. This was an all-too-common problem with other Gibson instruments like the Thunderbird.

The very first bass pickup that Gibson made was a large single coil. This was the beginning of that deep bass tone long associated with the brand—a specific sound and not for all tastes, but definitely all Gibson's own and certainly unlike its competitors over at Fender.

Up until late 1960, all Gibson basses had either plastic keystone or metal banjo tuners (yes, these were *actual* banjo tuners). I love the way they look and how sleek they make the headstock appear when viewed from the front.

1957

Gibson EB

MAHOGANY

The 1957 EB featured the first bass bridge that Gibson made, and although it's nearly impossible to perfectly intonate with it, the company stubbornly stuck to variations of it on all its Gibson and Epiphone basses (except the T-Bird, introduced in 1963) until sometime in 1967.

The EB wasn't a huge success, and it was discontinued in 1958, just prior to the introduction of the EB-0, leaving Gibson without a solid body bass at all for a short time. Perhaps there just weren't that many players ready to be electrified in the 1950s; they were still hooked on the stand-up. Hard to say.

Left to right: 1960 Les Paul Junior TV model, 1960 EB-0, and 1960 Les Paul Junior Cherry

THE ARRIVAL OF THE EB-0

Now we're gettin' more rock 'n' roll. Modeled along the lines of the slab-bodied Les Paul Juniors, the EB-0 arrived in 1959 as its boomy brother. I love the look of these—in fact, one of the first electric guitars I bought for myself was the Cherry Junior pictured in this trio shot. The EB-0 was born with many of the same early features as the EB-1 and EB-2: mahogany body

and neck, rosewood fingerboard, banjo tuners, and nickel bridge, but with the new humbucking pickup.

1960

Gibson EB-0

CHERRY

Left to Right: Two 1960 EB-0s: left and center, a very cherry beauty, and right, a well-played and modified road warrior

Beneath this cool black cover made of Royalite (a plastic similar to Bakelite) lie the workings of the improved Gibson bass pickup: the EB humbucker, which some cheekily refer to as a “mudbucker.” The four adjustable pole pieces have been moved to the center and are flanked by two vertical coils and Alnico magnets—but still produce the dark, deep, and thuddy EB-0 sound.

This earlier 1960 EB-0 was outfitted years ago with the superior 1960s Thunderbird “T-Bird” bridge. The mystery here is that, even though this bridge wasn’t seen until 1963, there’s no visible indication of a previous bridge (even under Skully’s trusty UV light); exactly when this particular bass left the factory—and with what bridge—we’ll never know for sure.

It’s a herd of bison! Introduced in 1961, the redesigned body style has endured to this day (unlike the bison)

1961

Gibson EB-3

CHERRY

Gibson

With their sharp double-cutaway horns, introduced in 1961 to both the bass and its guitar counterpart, the SG/Les Paul, the new look of both the EB-0 and then the EB-3 made them two of the coolest-looking basses ever. Quintessentially rock ’n’ roll. Although there have been quite a few excellent EB-3 players over the years, in my mind, it’s Jack Bruce who made it an icon.

Adding the second pickup—a mini-humbucker—brought more versatility and top-end clarity to the instrument, while retaining the classic EB-0 bottom, whereas the four-position Varitone rotary switch brought an unprecedented degree of tone-bending confusion. Option anxiety, anyone?

The plastic banjo tuners are gone, replaced by metal Kluson "elephant ear" machine heads, giving the headstock a heavier look.

1962

Gibson EB-6

CHERRY

(single pickup)

This is the first of two extremely rare six-string SG-style solid body models I was able to find. As time passes, it's becoming harder to verify how many were made, but shipping figures, such as they are, indicate that only about a dozen of this single-pickup version were ever manufactured. Before I acquired it, the bass was virtually unplayed. I'd better get busy!

Gibson

This special six-string bass features one PAF humbucking pickup. I tend to play it more like a guitar than a bass, and I find it has quite a haunting sound. It makes me want to play only minor chords.

This just looks mad—so many tuners, so little space. Interesting that

on this version—unlike the hollow-body EB-6 (see here)—Gibson opted for an elongated headstock and standard bass tuners.

1962

Gibson EB-6

CHERRY

(two pickup)

The two-pickup EB-6 made its debut in 1962, with its two PAF humbuckers, identical to the ones found on Gibson electric guitars in this period. It ceased production in 1965.

VOLUME
VOLUME
TONE
TONE

Note the addition of the mute assembly.

1962

Gibson EF-0F

CHERRY

I’ve never been one to use a lot of effects on a bass guitar. Occasionally, you’ll hear a bit of chorusing on a snippet of a solo, and because my sound already has so much twang mixed with distortion, I’ve never felt the need for an array of pedals (besides, my feet are busy enough, thank you). But then again, I had never had one of *these* babies before. They’re so much fun to play around with, I can’t imagine making a record in the future without one appearing *somewhere*.

ATTACK
OFF ON
IN
OUT
FUZZTONE

ATTACK

Gibson
FUZZTONE

HERE COMES THE FUZZ

In 1961, Marty Robbins had a number one hit single called “Don’t Worry” that featured a fuzzy bass tone played on a six-string bass, marking the first time a fuzz bass had reached such a wide audience. Legend has it that the fuzz sound on that record was caused by a faulty preamp, but regardless, the idea of a fuzz bass had

arrived. Gibson manufactured a small number of EB-0Fs with a built-in battery-powered FuzzTone that was also available as the standalone Maestro FZ-1 stomp box.

1963

Gibson EB-0

CHERRY

1965

Gibson EB-0

CHERRY

From a design perspective, these basses have been remarkably consistent since 1961, with the exception of their nickel-plated hardware being replaced by chrome plating around 1965. Gibson also added a chrome-plated cover to the pickup.

1966

Gibson Melody Maker

SPARKLING BURGUNDY

Here we present a Gibson student model uncommonly finished in Sparkling Burgundy. (For a note on this color, see here.) It was made with less-expensive parts, such as the bridge with nylon saddles, and Japanese tuners, which were also used by Harmony and many other companies. There aren't a ton of these around, and it's surprisingly difficult to find out much about them at all. We believe they were only built in 1966 and 1967—as opposed to the Melody Maker guitar, which has been recognized as a fairly respectable entry-level model since 1959.

Gibson
Gibson

1966

Gibson EB-0

EMBER RED

It’s extremely rare to find a custom color of this mid-1960s model. While the Pelham Blue Poly is scarce enough, the Ember Red is the only one we’ve ever encountered anywhere. According to Colin Cripps, one possible explanation is that if Gibson found a flaw in the wood, rather than waste the instrument, they’d save it for a day they were shooting a given color for actual custom orders.

Mutes in action!

1966

Gibson EB-0

PELHAM BLUE POLY

Gibson
Gibson

I love the antiquing effect on this finish. Guitar geeks call it

“checking”; in fine art they call it “craquelure.” Pelham Blue Poly was Gibson’s name for the 1960 Cadillac color it was borrowed from. This one’s going green, due to the ageing clear coat, which, unlike Fender, Gibson *always* used.

Ember Red first appeared on Gibson’s custom color chart in 1963, along with nine other hues. It was a 1958 Ford Edsel color. Available until 1969, it’s generally associated with Firebirds and Thunderbirds.

Epiphone

Short Scale

Solid Body

Epiphone basses, for some reason, seem to be underrated. Perhaps it's the misunderstanding that Epiphone was Gibson's secondary line. Actually, after it was bought out and moved from New York to Kalamazoo, the two brands were made side by side, with the same materials (with a couple of aesthetic exceptions) by the same builders, and sold for the same price. The Epiphones that I've gathered are as well-made as any Gibson (or, in fact, *any* guitar of the era). It seems to me, if you like the sound of a Gibson EB-0, you'll like the sound of the Newport EBS.

Epiphone

Epiphone

Three cool graphics: The “bikini” logo, that great big “e” you find on the pickguards, and the inlaid Epiphone logos are classic design holdovers from the company’s earlier days of the upright bass, but in my view have aged pretty well.

PUTTING THE “EPI” IN EPIC:
A Short History of Epiphone

There Are No "Short Cuts" To QUALITY In
EPIPHONE BASSES
ONLY AN EPIPHONE GIVES YOU
★ Natural Woods Throughout
★ Genuine Straight Grained Spruce Top
★ Genuine Curly Maple Body
★ Genuine Carved Scroll
★ Superlative Grade of Strings
★ Extremely Accurate Fingerboard
★ Fine Weight Balance
★ Hand Rubbed Finish
EPIPHONE, INC.
142 WEST 14 STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Left: Epi Stathopoulo

Right: Early Epiphone standup bass ad

In 1957, Gibson bought a company called Epiphone, which had been its main rival in the archtop market. Epiphone was never a maker of budget instruments, as we think of them in relation to Gibson today.

The Stathopoulo family started their luthier shop in 1873 in Greece, crafting traditional Greek instruments like *tabours* and *outis*; they reestablished in Smyrna, then fled trouble in the Ottoman Empire, setting up finally in Manhattan in 1904 as the House of Stathopoulo at the height of America’s mandolin craze. (Yes, there was a mandolin craze.) After the death of the patriarch, Anastasio, in 1915, his son Epi (Epaminondas) took over, moving quickly to meet demand for the next instrument du

jour, the banjo, and in 1923 named the burgeoning business after a contraction of the Greek word for sound, *phon*, and his own name. Hence: the Epiphone Banjo Company.

Epi established a reputation for high-end jazz instruments and technical innovations, such as individually adjustable pole pieces on pickups. After World War II, however, the company struggled, and it was taken over by its rival, Gibson.

There's a movie in there somewhere.

1961

Epiphone Newport EBS and Epiphone Newport Deluxe EB-D

CHERRY

Between 1961 and 1963, fewer than one hundred Deluxe EB-Ds were produced, making them hard to find today, and coveted by Epiphone nuts. Like other Newports, it has a symmetrical mahogany body, Honduras mahogany set-neck, rosewood fingerboard, and ebony finger rest.

This old feller has seen a lot of use—a testament to its tone. Epiphone's version of the EB-3, with the same two-pickup arrangement (minus the Varitone circuit), was a short-lived model that featured all-Gibson nickel-plated hardware of the period.

1963

Epiphone Newport EB-SF

CHERRY

Epiphone's version of a "fuzz bass," the Newport EB-SF, was released in 1963. It was similar to the Gibson EB-0F (pictured below) but had slightly different circuitry.

FUZZTONE

Epiphone
FUZZTONE
Gibson
FUZZTONE

1963

Epiphone Newport EBS-6

CHERRY

In this chapter we've already talked about six-string basses, and now I happily present to you the rarest member of the Gibson/Epi family: a single-pickup Newport six-string bass. Produced only in teeny-tiny numbers between 1962 and 1965, apparently fewer than ten of these were made in 1963.

Unlike its Gibson counterpart, this Epi six-string is mounted with Kluson single-line guitar tuners, which gives it a more streamlined vibe.

Like the single-pickup Gibson model, this Epiphone Newport EBS-6 has a push-button Baritone Switch and features a minihumbucking pickup. I suppose the idea on all the basses with this switch is you could engage the circuit, which dumped the bottom end out, and play baritone-guitar-type parts. Hard to say how much use this ever got (it's somewhat useless by modern standards), though Gibson continued to put it on a number of its basses.

Everybody loves a stinger. Stingers are cool. Sometimes found on the back of a headstock, and sometimes at the heel of the neck, stingers were, for the most part, purely decorative. But I know that Charlie Gelber at OK Guitars, who explores all things Gibson on his excellent blog (www.es-335.com), investigated a couple of ES-355s with stingers and found that, on occasion, they'd been painted over with a veneer to conceal what was once an ES-335 headstock that had been modified. As Charlie says, "There's no doubt that the company policy at Fender and Gibson was 'waste not.'"

A-ha! The ES-335 headstock, revealed *(Charlie Gelber)*

117072

Gibson-Epiphone

Short Scale Hollow Body

My earliest recollections of hollow-body archtops go back to a couple of bands from England in the early 1960s: the Yardbirds, whose “For Your Love” was one of the first numbers I ever figured out on my own, and the Animals, whose song “The House of the Rising Sun” was one that every young garage band of my generation *had* to know. The image of the Yardbirds’ bassist, Paul Samwell-Smith, playing his early Sunburst Rivoli is a standout in my mind (Jimmy Page occasionally played one with the

Yardbirds, too); ditto for Animal Chas Chandler with his Rivoli and EB-2, Les Chadwick of Gerry and the Pacemakers, Tony Jackson of the Searchers . . .

Looking at old photos, I wondered for a long time why the musicians of the British invasion so often played Epiphones rather than the Fenders and Gibsons seen in the hands of their American counterparts. Well, basically, when the UK embargo on US instruments was over, there was a scramble for the marketplace, and Epiphone's aggressive UK distributor, Rosetti (maker of guitars, too; Keith Richards and George Harrison owned Rosetti acoustics in their teens), was more successful at establishing the brand for a time than its Gibson rival, Selmer.

Anyway, even though the image of the archtop bass was implanted in my subconscious, it didn't figure at all when I made my first leap at becoming a musician. My choice was simply guided by what was available, just as it was for those Brits—and, come to think of it, almost every bassist I've interviewed for this book. Thinking back to the day I bought my first bass, I have no recollection whatsoever of archtops in the shop (although they must have been there); only that black Canora, which, with my measly thirty-five dollars, I could just about afford.

Left to Right: The appeal of the EB-2 spanned the ages. The Yardbirds on *Ready Steady Go!* in 1966 *(CA/Redferns)*; Suzi Quatro in 1974 *(ABC/Getty Images)*

1958

Gibson EB-2

SUNBURST

It’s always exciting to find an early first-year example in such good condition. The EB-2 was designed as the bass partner to the ES-335, Mickey Mouse ears and all; it has a lightweight single-bound maple body with a one-piece mahogany neck, two-a-side banjo tuners, and Gibson’s early single-coil bass pickup. In 1958, it was available in only one other “color”: Natural.

“The amount of sheer low end coming from those old Gibson pickups is astounding, and I have since developed quite a crush on them. . . .”

1959

Gibson EB-2

NATURAL

Did I say stingers are cool? Here’s a striking example of one on the neck heel of this pristine EB-2N, which also features an early humbucking pickup.

Two 1959 kissin’ cousins: the EB-2 Natural and the ES-335N.

1959

Gibson EB-2

SUNBURST

This model is almost identical to the ’58, with the exception of the “Baritone Switch,” which the *Gibson Gazette* of 1959 described this way: “New push-button switch gives a clear baritone voicing . . . popular for rock ’n’ roll.” This choke was designed with bass-cut circuitry, I suppose, for the 1950s player who for some reason might have occasionally wanted less bass. Of course, I want *all* the bottom *all* the time, so I never go near that button.

1960

Gibson EB-6

SUNBURST

The EB-6 bass guitar was the first of its sort created by Gibson. It was produced for only a year, then was replaced by the SG-style models seen in the previous section. Aside from the familiar humbucking guitar PAF pickup and tuners, in every other respect it’s an EB-2.

Gibson

Due to the instability of plastics of this period, it’s not uncommon to find tuner buttons from the 1940s and 1950s and even into the early 1960s, such as the tulips on this instrument, that have deteriorated over time. This is especially true for instruments that have spent a lot of time in their cases. It also affected some types of binding and pickguards of the era, but rather unpredictably.

1960

Epiphone Rivoli EB-232

SUNBURST

This bass’s name harkens back to the Rivoli mandolins produced by Epiphone since the 1930s. (Most Gibson-made Epiphones took their names from the earlier Epiphone era.) The twin to the EB-2, it differs only in slight design details, like the headstock shape, its inlaid logo, and pickguard material. I can tell you that sonically they are every bit the equal to the EB-2.

This old-style inlaid logo is rare and seldom seen.

1966

Epiphone Rivoli

NATURAL

If shipping figures are to be believed, after making only a few of these natural Blondes in 1961, Gibson didn’t produce another until 1966, when it made a whole whack of them. The only notable change, which happened to all Gibson/Epi-produced basses as of 1965, was the appearance of chrome plating on the pickup and the bridge.

By this time, the banjo tuners had been replaced with Klusons, and the inlaid logo on the headstock was changed to feature the same classic and stylized *e* that was already seen on their pickguards.

Epiphone

1966

Gibson EB-2 Custom

BLACK

Talk about unique. Someone decided he or she loved the look of a “Black Beauty” Les Paul Custom, as this bass was ordered with many of the same cosmetic appointments. I don’t know why the purchaser stopped short of adding *gold* parts, but still, what a great idea. Seen below on the left of the EB-2 is my late ’52 Les Paul Custom, which shows the binding and headstock details that influenced this custom-built bass.

Aside from the CBS Jazz Basses of the late 1960s and early 1970s, there are only three other instruments in my collection that have a first fret marker: the ’92 Zemaitis, the ’61 National, and this EB-2. I know, I know, the first fret isn’t exactly a challenge to find, but I’d love to see this feature more often, as it makes the neck look complete (in my humble opinion).

Gibson
Gibson
CUSTOM MADE

1966

Gibson EB-2 Custom

POLARIS WHITE

Here’s a custom-ordered EB-2 in Polaris White. Looks absolutely delish. It could be unique, as I’ve never seen another, but as with most custom colors, some collector *some*where must have one stashed away.

Gibson

1967

Gibson EB-2D

CHERRY RED

Introduced in 1966, the EB-2D is identical to a standard EB-2, but like its cousin the EB-3, it has an added minibass humbucker with requisite toggle switch. It also has a chrome bridge cover for the first time, and a mute.

“Witch hat” knobs become standard issue on many Gibson instruments as of 1967. (But aren’t witch hats *pointy*?)

1967

Gibson EB-2

SPARKLING BURGUNDY

This cool, subtle metallic color was introduced in 1965, but it didn’t appear on the Firebird custom color charts. Why? In his book, *Gibson Electrics*, André Duchossoir quotes Stanley Rendell, president of Gibson in the early 1970s, to shed some light on the matter. Gibson was having paint-checking problems with its 335 series. Rendell says, “So they came up with a finish—Sparkling Burgundy—[which] was a disguise mechanism. They would fill the cracks and spray Sparkling Burgundy to cover the repair.” Consequently, in 1967, Gibson decided to add it as a regular finish on its thinline models, among others.

1961

Gibson EBS-1250

CHERRY

(Refin)

In the early 1960s, Gibson doublenecks were built as custom orders only, and this one may be unique. The deep-sounding bass side has typical Gibson bass features, humbucker and all, while the guitar side produces an almighty sound, thanks to the size of its body combined with two awesome-sounding PAF pickups. This carved spruce-top, hollow maple-body instrument, with its mahogany necks and gorgeous Florentine-style cutaways, is a predecessor to the SG-style solid mahogany doublenecks.

Gibson
Gibson

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

This beauty doubleneck has had only three owners before me. The first was a young man who walked into a rural Kansas store to buy a Hammond organ: he traded in some gear and had credit left over, but the store was reluctant to give him money, so he pointed to this brand new doubleneck and said, "I'll take that thing, I guess."

Apparently, he played the heck out of the Hammond, but barely touched the Gibson, and it seems he didn't care for its bright cherry color either. He stripped the "thing" down to bare wood, never got around to repainting it, and sold it that way in 2011 to a well-known Chicago music store. They rightfully asked Gibson to restore it to its former glory, which they most certainly did. A friend of mine then bought it from that shop, and I bought it from him. Thanks, mate!

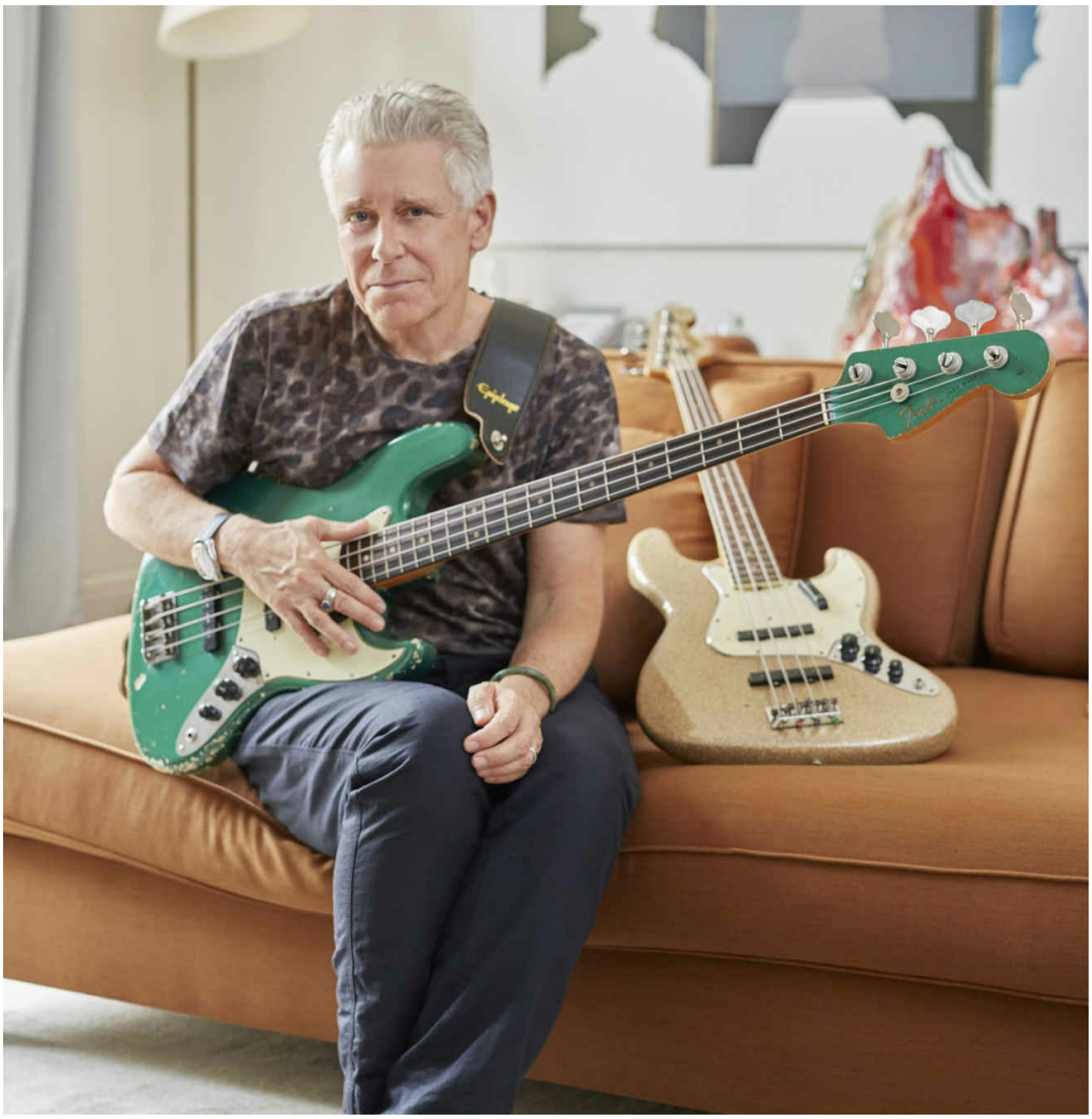
Switchedee-doo-dah! Three-way pickup selector switch (for guitar), three-way neck selector, and Baritone Switch.

Interview with

Adam Clayton

Bassist and founding member of U2, aficionado and collector of art, photography, and—as it happens—bass guitars

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 25, 2017



GEDDY LEE: Can I ask you a question about growing up? When was the first time you remember noticing a bass part in a song or being motivated by a bass part in a song?

ADAM CLAYTON: At home we listened to AM radio a lot, so I couldn't specifically say, but I always enjoyed the warmth of the low end, even though it took me a while to figure out the difference between a guitar and a bass. There wasn't any reproductive equipment where you could hear bottom end the way we do now.

GL: So, when you were a kid, the music that you first got interested in would have been American music or British?

AC: It was pretty much British. I was born in 1960, and I grew up in a family of aunts who would have been ten years old and up and Beatles fans.

American music didn't really come to me in Ireland. We were there from about '65, and again, the radio was very limited and I didn't really like chart music that much. On Radio Caroline I started to hear more interesting things. I became more of an album-buying kind of music fan, with all the usuals—Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Black Sabbath—but I eventually realized it felt like a different generation's music. Then punk happened, which, given the economic woes in the UK at the time, seemed to connect much more. And the great thing about the whole punk movement was bass players started to become very distinguishable, started to have their own identity, started to be pushed to the front of the sound. So people like Paul Simonon from the Clash, Bruce Foxton from the Jam, and Jean-Jacques Burnel from the Stranglers were all people that I went, "Yeah I want to be like that." And like Foxton's, my very first proper bass was a Rickenbacker, which *you'd* be familiar with! I thought it looked great, but it took me a while to figure it out; it was so hard to get a sound on.

GL: It's true!

AC: And, of course, what came with punk was the attitude that you just get a few basic bits of equipment together and do it yourself. Everybody in the band had an important role to play, and you brought your limitation to the way you played. I'm thinking about [the way] Peter Hook played in Joy Division. That was how he got his style. So, in our band, the way I learnt to play was very, you know, try and find the sound that could dominate the spectrum—which is why the Precision Bass was the tool of choice.

GL: So your Precision, was that your first bass, or did you have a budget instrument first?

AC: I had an Ibanez SG copy, or an EB-3 copy, which was probably better than I thought it was at the time, but for our band any bass that was too low down and too round didn't work. When we were starting out and trying to kind of figure out what our sound was, Edge would shy away from the big, heavy power chords, which is what all the punk bands were doing, and instead create these very melodic, arpeggiated parts which got more and more complex as he added echo to them. And that needed a bass end that had a punchy midrange. So I thought, "Okay, I'll try and get a Precision." My dad used to go to the US occasionally, and he got me a secondhand one at Manny's on Forty-Eighth Street, for I think

$150. I thought that was great, but to me it just didn't *look* great. So there was a guy I knew who had a Rickenbacker, and I thought, "That'd look great," and after a couple of months I swapped my Precision for it. It was much more of a punky bass in photographs, but just never sounded good. So I eventually sold that and went back to the Precision.

GL: And when you started playing bass, were you with the guys in U2 or in other bands? How did your career start as a bassist?

AC: I was in boarding school until the age of sixteen. My best friend there was quite a good musician, and he sort of taught me guitar. He was a big King Crimson fan, Edgar Broughton. . . . We had the original Glastonbury three-disk set with Hawkwind on it, and he said to me, "If you get a bass, I'll teach you how to play and we'll form a band." He had this elaborate kind of rock opera based on an Irish legend à la *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* that we were gonna do, but right in the middle of this rock 'n' roll dream I moved to a much more urban sort of inner-city school, which is probably a really good thing because that was when punk happened. When U2 got together in 1976 we found that as long as we were trying to make our own thing, it seemed more interesting than covering somebody else's song badly.

GL: And that was when you decided to go back to the Precision?

AC: By '79 we had our first single out, and in 1980 the first album, and that was all on the Precision. I always thought the Jazz was so much more beautiful an instrument to look at, just the shape of it, and it seemed like if it had one more pickup than the Precision, then it *must* be better! But it wasn't the sound that particularly worked for our band. That P-Bass midrange is kind of unique. I went through the Jazzes and I went through the Gibsons—I mean, I loved my Gibson bass, but they didn't work for our band. They're just boomy and low end with no midrange or even top. But I have used—what's that, Jack Casady Les Paul bass? It's a beaut! And I've used T-Birds. I like the Gibson RD Artist range as well.

GL: I've noticed that sometimes you use a pick and sometimes not. . . .

AC: I don't really have a rule, but sometimes when we're honing a song I just kind of go with what feels like it's going to give me the most options, be the most fruitful for what's needed.

GL: And on those early records you just mentioned?

AC: That was very much the pick, because on the first three albums, it was all about being in time, and with a punchy-enough top end you really can

push that tune along.

GL: You really do take on a role of keeping time, really locking in with the drums. Edge's guitar parts are so circular, with that wash of melodies and echoes, that the one constant thing is the pulse you provide. It seems to me that without that, it would be hard to get a handle on the tune.

AC: I'd love to say it was an intentional decision. I think it was just instinct!

GL: I was listening to "Beautiful Day" this morning and noted that repeating high melodic bass line. A lot of bass players would have gone low, but you kind of elevate it. You keep the melody in the upper range, and I just think it's lovely because the whole song hangs off it. But I'm a bass player, so I'm obviously biased! So that was a stack knob you played on that song?

AC: It was.

GL: Sweet! Did Motown have an influence on you? The other guys in U2 have often mentioned Motown. . . .

AC: Oh yeah, Motown spoke to me, of most of American music. James Jamerson would be the ultimate for me. He had *attitude*. Carol Kaye's parts from that period were great, too, and Donald "Duck" Dunn's, and then the king at that time or slightly later was Bootsy Collins. I mean, all those players made you really notice the bass.

GL: I read that you worked with Patrick Pfeiffer. What can you tell me about that, and the effect he had on the way you look at your instrument?

AC: Well, I started to realize that no matter your training, you can go on to do more. I knew I didn't have enough music theory to feel confident, and

I felt I was running out of where to go creatively. So I was in New York for three or four months, and Patrick started me on scales, taught me about inversions, and took me through the theory so that whenever I got into a problem I could go, "Okay that'll help me here." It was very good for my discipline.

GL: And when did you first consider yourself to be collecting basses?

AC: Our equipment used to be stored in a warehouse in Dublin, and there was a flash flood one summer. All our equipment got destroyed, but there was an insurance claim. And I had all this old junk stuff that wasn't really worth replacing, so I took that insurance check and went out to buy some vintage basses! Up to that point I'd always pooh-poohed vintage equipment, but I got a 1965 Sherwood Green Jazz Bass, which I'll show you in a minute. It was the first Jazz Bass I'd ever come across where the pickups were really very hot midrangey, and it was just the best-sounding bass I'd come across! Then I picked up a couple of '58, '59 Precisions in great condition, and they sounded great, like my '74 Precision, and I started to develop an interest. Oh, but *then* the odd thing you find as a collector is the value of these instruments tends to be [based more] on the rarity of the color than on the sonics.

GL: Yeah, for collectors it's a color madness. I know, I'm guilty of it as well!

AC: Exactly. So then I started to collect the custom colors, and occasionally find something really unique. I've got a Burgundy Mist Jazz Bass, which is a beautiful color. I've no idea how many were ever made. I've actually ended up with quite a lot of regular Gold Jazzes and Precisions, which again I think is quite a rare color. But, yes, I do keep an eye out for the colors at this point. I got a Foam Green P-Bass many years ago which allegedly came from the Troggs, but again, it didn't sound good, and I put it in a cupboard.

GL: You'll have to let me know what you're looking for, and we can do some swapping! Because I'm looking all the time.

AC: What I would like to do, but I'm too disorganized, before all the punk bands get too old and die, is talk to them about buying their basses, the ones I grew up with them playing. Otherwise they're not going to be held together as a collection. But you know what it's like, asking about someone's main instrument that way. You'd feel like you're robbing their first child.

Adam’s 1966 Champagne Gold Sparkle Jazz Bass *(left)*, Adam’s 1964 Sherwood Green Jazz Bass *(right)*

Adam rockin’ the stadium with his Gibson Jack Casady Model
(Eddit Monsoon)

Pete Way of UFO *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

Gibson

Thunderbird

I've been touring for more than forty years and, though it may sound weird, in a sense playing in a vacuum, because I've been so focused on the sound I wanted to achieve—my *identity* in sound, if you will. I've used only the instruments I believed could get me to that sonic place. I pushed everything else out of the way! So here I am forty-four years later, looking more closely than ever before at the early days of bass, and learning things I would have known had I given myself access to them then. Like the Thunderbird.

Of my era, I know that bassists like John Entwistle, Glenn Cornick of Jethro Tull, and Martin Turner of Wishbone Ash have all played the Thunderbird to great effect, and I've shared the stage with others who've done the same, but that instrument always seemed odd and cumbersome to me—and, again, not *my* sound. I remember touring in the 1980s with bands such as Mott the Hoople, whose bass player, Pete Overend Watts, played a T-Bird, and, of course, UFO, in particular bassist Pete Way, who was a pal at the time and a devotee of the cult. The instruments confounded me, and so I once asked Mr. Way what it was exactly that he loved so much about them.

"Well, Glee," he replied, "they sound three-quarters quite good, and one-quarter not very nice."

Hah! But as much as I love that quote, I wasn't buying in. It wasn't until 2015, when my collecting obsession was in full swing and I'd started to appreciate Gibsons in the context of the early 1960s, that I tried out Thunderbirds in rehearsal with Rush. And that was when I discovered something important. . . .

As it turns out, the Thunderbird's bass sound suits Rush surprisingly well. Only now do I value the way it fits in the tonal register. It has the kind of bottom end that sits well below Alex's midrange guitar sound and the crash

and swirl of Neil's "cymbalic" hardware array. No small feat! And although it doesn't have the *twang* I usually lean on so heavily, it does have definition of a different sort. Due to its tight and well-formed lower midrange and bottom presence, I find I can turn it up quite loud in the mix (where all bass should be anyway) without getting in the way of my bandmates—as in the songs "Animate" and "How It Is" on *R40 Live*. It took me a while to figure it out, but the T-Bird is winning me over.

How 'bout *that*, eh, Pete?!

Glenn Cornick with Wild Turkey at The Roundhouse, London, 1971
(Michael Putland/Getty Images)

Gibson

Thunderbird

Reverse

Thunderbirds were a revolutionary instrument for Gibson, in the same futuristic vein as the Korina Explorers and Flying V basses that had come out of the six-string department five years earlier. Gibson's president, Ted McCarty, hired Ray Dietrich—a guy with no experience designing musical instruments, but who'd worked for the Big Three car manufacturers, drafting car bodies like the Chrysler Airstream and Custom Imperial, and the Packard Dietrich Sport Sedan. That was really thinking outside the box, but McCarty had to challenge the perception that Gibson was a staid, conservative company.

Ray Dietrich at Chrysler

It seems clear to me that, shapewise, Dietrich took some inspiration from the Explorer, but in his design for both the T-Bird and its six-string counterpart, the Firebird, he borrowed aspects of Fender’s trademark

"contoured body" and the offset bodies of its Jazzmaster and Jaguar. (Certainly Fender thought so; it filed a patent-infringement suit.) Like the Firebird, with its "reverse" configuration and its upside-down headstock resembling the tail fins of cars of the era, it was a radical look that made a big splash. It was also the first time Gibson offered a full range of custom colors that you could choose from on paper. (Before that, you could have ordered anything you wanted, but you had to know to ask for it at the factory.) The name, by the way, was borrowed from popular Native American myths about the origin of thunder and lightning; the legendary creature is often depicted atop totem poles.

The design was sensational, but problematic. The long one-piece neck-through construction and the tilted-back headstock with the tuners all on one side was an accident waiting to happen. The instrument was fragile and headstocks would regularly crack or even break in transit. (Keith Moon broke one of John Entwistle's just by tripping over it.) And so, after causing a buzz in 1963 and 1964, Gibson started getting returns. With little more than a thousand made of both the Thunderbird II and IV combined, their numbers dropped off really fast in 1965 and production ceased. Gibson decided to reinvent the instrument, and gave birth to the "non-reverse."

MARTIN TURNER OF WISHBONE ASH TALKS ABOUT T-BIRDS

I first saw a Thunderbird Bass guitar being used by John Gustafson of the Merseybeats in 1964. I was playing a homemade bass with a Framus pickup at the time that I bought from a friend for £5. I fell in love with Gibson's Thunderbird on the spot (I've always referred to its design as a cricket bat with wings) but it wasn't until 1972 that I managed to acquire one. I bought it from Pete "Overend" Watts of Mott the Hoople when Wishbone supported them on the All the Young Dudes Tour of the UK. Pete had abused the poor thing—it was in a bit of a state—so I got it rebuilt as well as refinished, mainly to hide the dings. It started life as a Sunburst instrument and was sprayed an ivory color during the repairs. I still have this guitar, which was built in 1965, but I only use it occasionally since it's become somewhat aged, as indeed am I. The old 1960s Gibson T-Birds were fitted with Alnico pickups, of which there were two different models. In my opinion, the '63 pickup has a somewhat nicer tone, more Fender-like, but the '66 is a bit hotter. However, both will give you a great sound. We always referred to the headstock as a Viking longship. A lot of people complained about the neck diving into the floor, but that wasn't a problem for me; I found it encouraged a chap to move and dance around on stage rather than stay in

one position as so many bass players tend to do.

Martin Turner with Wishbone Ash at Alexandra Palace, London, December 22, 1973 *(Michael Putland, Getty Images)*

1964

Gibson Thunderbird II

SUNBURST

Gibson’s first long-scale bass arrived in 1963. It’s generally agreed that this was a response to the success of Fender’s long-scale instruments. I know shipping totals are unreliable, but I love that apparently a grand total of two T-Bird II’s were shipped that first year.

The single-pickup T-Bird II was described in the 1964 Gibson catalog as “a fine, new economy priced bass.” It sold for a whopping $260, compared with Fender’s one-pickup model, the Precision, which cost $229.50 (custom color $15 extra).

1964

Gibson Thunderbird IV

SUNBURST

Top left and right: Very happy to discover that this T-Bird—the first I acquired—originated in my home and native land. Bring back the Expos!

Bottom left and right: Both these basses came with Gibson's new Tune-O-Matic bridge, which was an improvement for sure over the older EB-2 style, but some T-Birds still had intonation issues due to the bridges being placed too far back—especially the higher you climbed up the fretboard. As the T-Bird IV was one of my touring instruments, we chose to install one of Scott Dasson's excellent Badbird bridges, which easily mount on the original bridge studs.

1964

Gibson Thunderbird IV

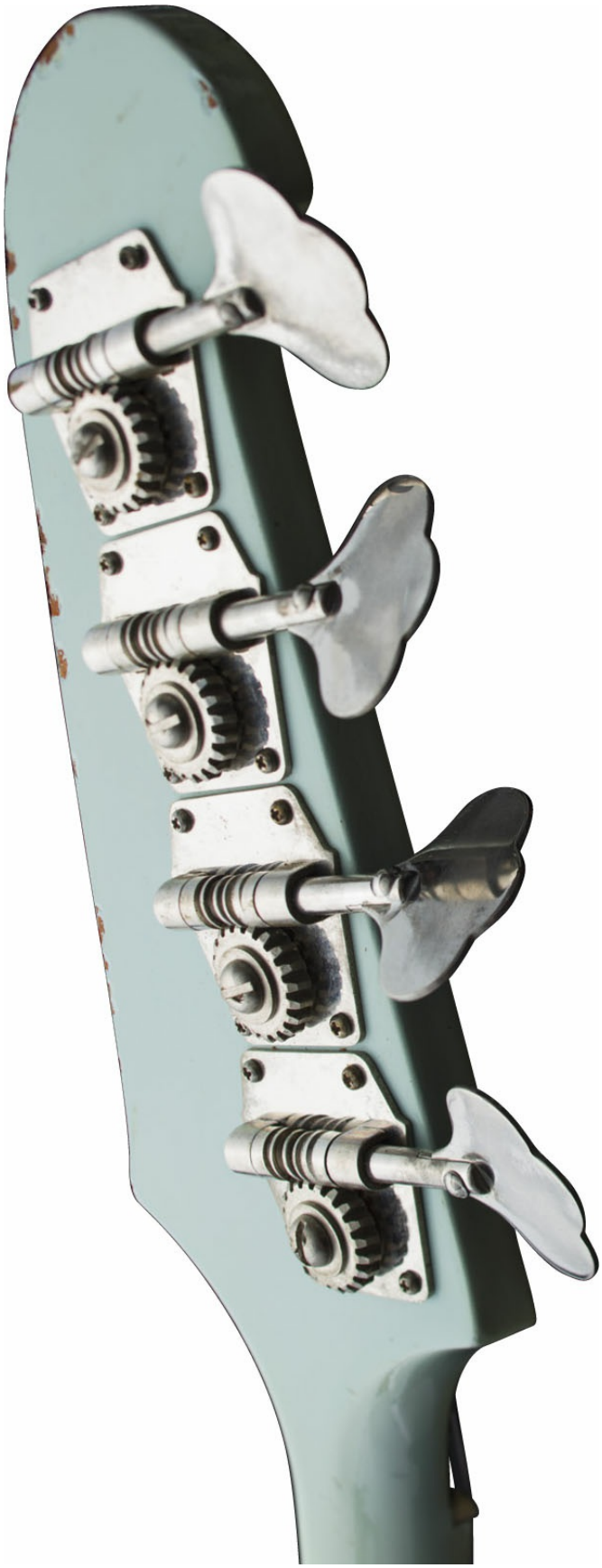
FROST BLUE

Frost Blue! Extremely rare to find, and this one is in terrific condition, with all original parts intact. It has never suffered cracks or breakage, as so many others have.

Playing the T-Birds on tour was a revelation. I was amazed at how good

they sounded, and I realized that the central positioning and design of their twin nickel-plated humbuckers really are a resounding success. Shapewise, I think they’re kinda slick; Colin Cripps says they remind him of the earliest humbuckers Gibson fit on its Console 530 lap steels back in 1956.

Above and below: Look closely at a Thunderbird, and you can see what an expensive, labor-intensive instrument it was to make. The first Firebird guitars had one long piece of two-ply Honduras mahogany with a walnut center seam from headstock to butt; the Thunderbirds required a nine-ply laminate of mahogany with maple strips to compensate for the heavier tension of the bass strings. You've got asymmetrical mahogany wings glued on and connected with strong mortise-and-tenon joinery. Having the entire length of the strings vibrating on one long piece of wood was intended to wring more sustain from the bass.



1964

Gibson Thunderbird IV

CARDINAL RED

So much of the buy is in the body"
Foreground: Buick Electra 225 Riviera Sedan.
Background: Buick Electra 225 Convertible.
Body by Fisher makes it a better buy!
Body by Fisher
When you consider buying a new car, consider this: The car's body is where you and your family will ride, relax, see and hear. It is where you will live.
So when you look into a new car, look over its body. Make sure it carries the coachmark of quality.
Body by Fisher—the most carefully crafted, fully featured and thoroughly road-tested body ever built. A quick glance at the column of no-cost extras on the left will convince you that Body by Fisher makes it a better buy!
CHEVROLET · PONTIAC · OLDSMOBILE · BUICK · CADILLAC

Gibson's Cardinal Red and Ember Red often get confused—even by some of the most knowledgeable collectors. As a birdwatcher, I can tell you that cardinals have both dark red and orangey bits, so it's understandable. Reds are hard to nail photographically too; they fool the camera lens. But for the record: Cardinal Red was based on a Buick color from the early 1960s.

Here’s the color and here’s the car.

It’s all in the details. I love the way Gibson painted the edges of the neck around the fingerboard rather than use binding. (They also dabbed little white marker dots on the upper edge of the neck.) From the little chips in the paint, you can see that this one has likely been re-fretted.

1964

Gibson Thunderbird II

PELHAM BLUE POLY

1965

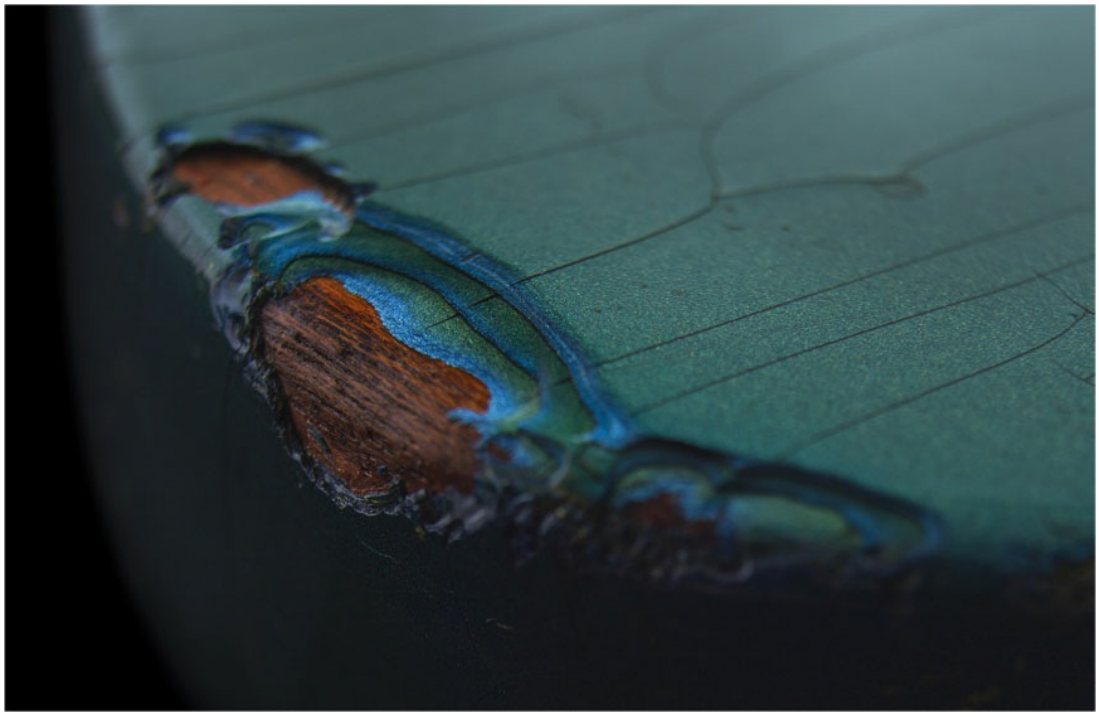
Gibson Thunderbird IV

PELHAM BLUE POLY

VOLUME
VOLUME
TONE

Left to Right: ’66 Trini Lopez guitar; ’64 T-Bird II; ’66 T-Bird IV N-R; ’66 EB-0; ’67 T-Bird II N-R; ’65 T-Bird IV; ’64 Firebird III

As with the Firebird, these instruments were introduced with a chart that gave you a choice of ten glorious original custom colors: Ember Red, Cardinal Red, Polaris White, Golden Mist Poly, Silver Mist Poly, Heather Poly, Pelham Blue Poly, Frost Blue, Kerry Green, and Inverness Green Poly. As with Fender, these were basically car colors, available on all instruments from 1963 to 1969. Before 1963, you could order from a range of colors that were limited to Sunburst, Natural, White, Black, Les Paul Gold, and Cherry Red. In general, of course, dealers didn’t push custom colors, because their priority was to sell stock in hand. It was like, “C’mon, son. Man up and take the brown one!”



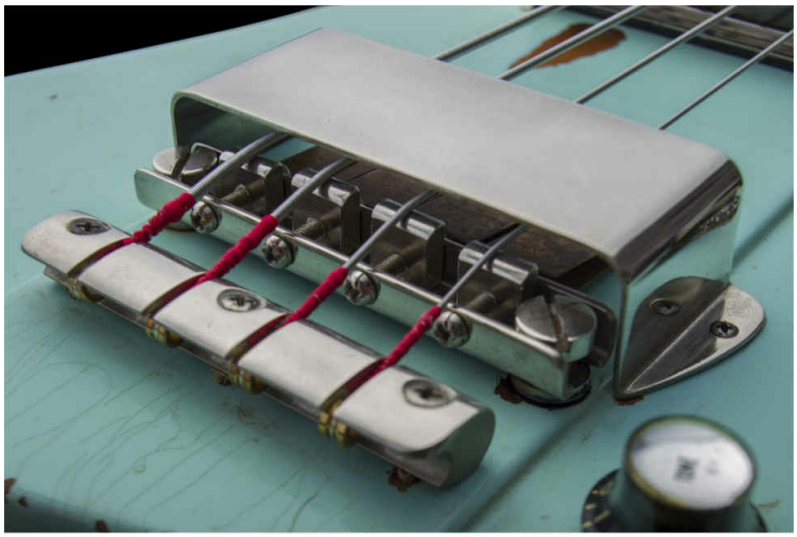
As the rings of a tree reveal its age, the layers of paint seen through this chip show the original Pelham Blue Poly in all its pre-oxidized glory.

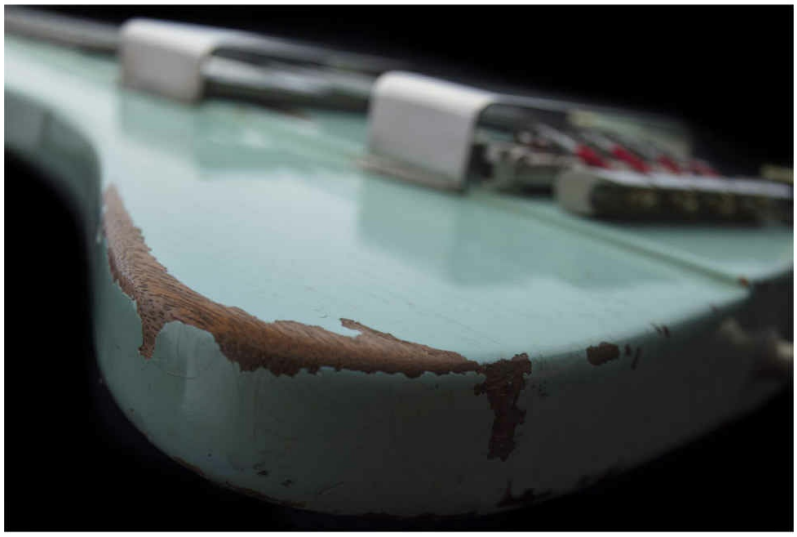
1964

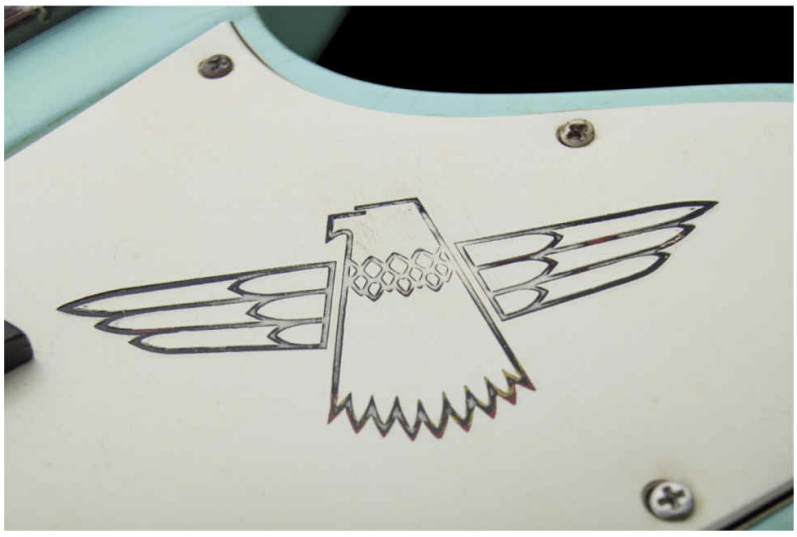
Gibson Thunderbird II

KERRY GREEN

These beasts are neck heavy. I found I had to recalibrate my brain when switching midset from any other model bass. Due to the length of their necks and the acreage of their bodies, if I forgot to check where my starting fret actually was, I’d invariably launch into the song a semitone sharp.







1964

Epiphone Embassy Deluxe EB-DL

CHERRY

Here we have the Epiphone version of the T-Bird IV. Similarities: 34" scale, pickups, tuning machines, Tune-O-Matic bridge assembly, and tailpiece. Differences: second-generation asymmetrical Newport-style body, set-neck, batwing headstock, pickguard, and knobs. In the Embassy's year, 1963, Gibson says it shipped one—and I do mean *one*. In 1964, the number jumped to about 150—again, not verifiable, but you get the story.

To get this one ready for the road, we installed a Badbird bridge.

Look at those weirdo knobs. I think they look like cupcake wrappers!

1960s

Gibson Thunderbird IV

HEATHER POLY

(project)

This spectacularly colored bass (among others in my collection) came from a friend and longtime collector Brian Fischer. As he tells it:

“Between 1985 and 1987, after Gibson had completed their move to Nashville, some Firebird and Thunderbird bodies were left behind in Kalamazoo. A longtime employee who did not want to relocate purchased one Thunderbird and ten Firebird blanks (there are three pieces to each instrument; the neck-through and the wings), and I bought the T-Bird blank from him. He didn’t have all the hardware and electronics, but with lots of

searching I was able to assemble mostly period-correct or slightly later NOS [new old stock] parts. The body was then put together and painted locally with the exact-numbered Heather Poly paint."

So this "project Thunderbird" is an orphan of sorts. It will never be a true spec Gibson, as it was neither assembled nor painted at the factory, but it's a beauty nonetheless, an example of a very rare T-Bird color that sounds every bit a classic T-Bird.

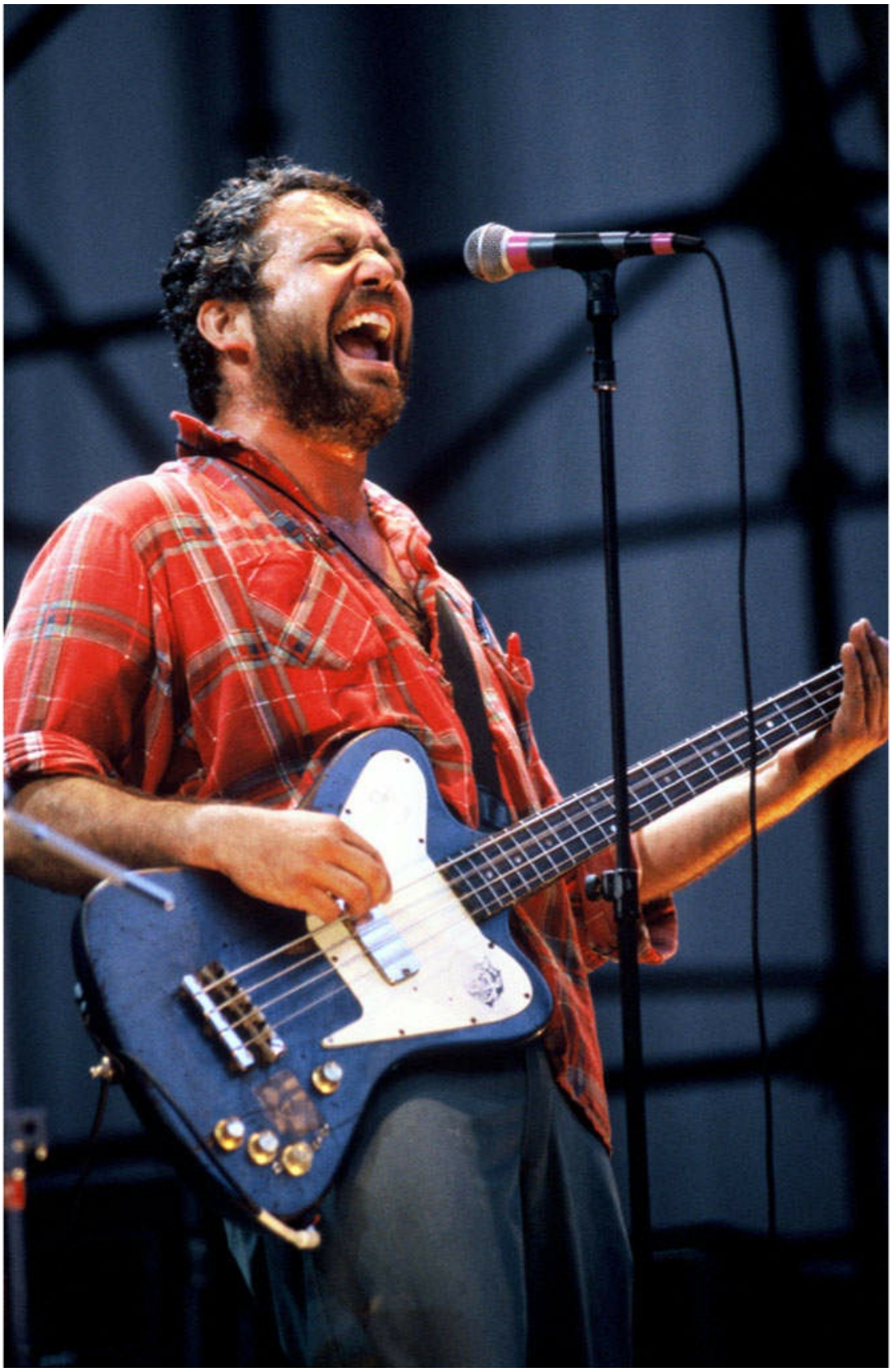
This cool-to-look-at mute assembly is riveted to the bridge itself. This is what people wanted in the day, but if you didn't want to utilize the mutes to deaden your sound, you'd have to either pull the felt blocks off or drill the assembly right out, which is why nowadays you almost always see the metal springs with the felt removed.

"The sad fact is that the Thunderbird wasn't popular. In 1965, after only two years and just over a thousand made, it was discontinued. But wait! Gibson had another go at it in 1966. . . ."

Gibson

Thunderbird

Non-Reverse



Mike Watt of the Minutemen, 1995, at the Greek Theater, Berkeley, California *(Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images)*

In 1966, the redesigned T-Bird—referred to as the "non-reverse," which used to confuse the hell out of me—makes its appearance. Clearly Gibson was looking for more success with this version, but it also changed it for economic reasons, and partly because of that lawsuit by Fender. They ditched the neck-through construction in favor of a set-neck on a slab mahogany body, and flipped the horn from bottom to top (hence the nickname). It seems more conventional to me than the reverse. Not unappealing in its own right—and yes, more practical—but less outrageous. To my taste, the original, reverse-bodied T-Birds have what the hopelessly romantic prince in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* calls "a certain . . . special . . . sumthin'. . . ."

Despite all the changes and the new look, not to mention the incredible range of custom colors, and even the fact that they were less expensive than the smaller EB basses, the instrument still didn't catch on, with fewer than 750 of them shipped. It's too bad that in the end both versions of the T-Bird were unpopular, because both sound really good (they should, because they have the same pickups), and they stand out in the crowd. But one man's ceiling is another man's floor, and their rarity has been a boon and an obsession among collectors.

1966

Gibson Thunderbird IV

INVERNESS

GREEN POLY

I love this hue, though it’s gone even greener than was intended. While I prefer the overall body shape of the reverse model, the heart-like pickguard on the non-reverse is pretty darn cool.

On the redesigned T-Bird, chrome plating replaces nickel for the visible metalwork: pickup and bridge covers, handrests, Tune-O-Matic bridge, and tailpiece and tuners.

1966

Gibson Thunderbird IV
PELHAM BLUE POLY

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

This '66 T-Bird IV, which came to me from the Netherlands, has a worldly pedigree. The story starts with two Greek partisans who fought the Nazis side by side in World War II. After the war, one of them became the musical director on a transatlantic cruise ship, and in 1967 he bought the bass while on a port of call in New York. His own offspring was not musically inclined, but Aristotelis, the son of his wartime blood brother, became an accomplished upright player in a classical orchestra; he had come to think of that young man as family, and on his retirement gave him the instrument as a gift. Aristotelis played the T-Bird in a small avant-garde band, but the gig wasn't lucrative, and so after some years—reluctantly, but with the old man's blessing—he decided to sell it on consignment through a store in Nijmegen, where a very nice man named Paul sold it to me!

1967

Gibson Thunderbird II

PELHAM BLUE POLY

1967

Gibson Thunderbird IV

GOLDEN MIST POLY

Late 1960s

Gibson Thunderbird II

GOLDEN MIST POLY

Call it accidental art. Sometimes the finish breaks up in such a way that I find it becomes a plus, not a minus. For some reason, quite a few of my non-reverse T-Birds crack with apparent design, and this one looks kind of Klimt-y to me.

1967

Gibson Thunderbird IV

SPARKLING BURGUNDY

VOL
VOL

1967

Gibson Thunderbird II

DARK CHERRY

Left to right: T-Bird IV and T-Bird II

Late 1960s

Gibson Thunderbird II

POLARIS WHITE

Mute assembly, with the felt pulled off.

This was the first non-reverse bass that I acquired. I was so impressed with its

tone that I wanted to use it on the R40 Tour, and selected it for the song "How it Is." Being the first Thunderbird to make an appearance in a Rush show, it got quite a number of shocked looks from the crowd. For one, its sheer size and peculiar shape, plus the fact that the white color makes it look even bigger than it is, seemed to make people wonder, "What *is* that thing?"

One of these is not like the others. . . .

Reverse or non-reverse, seldom do you see more anomalies than on a T-Bird. We've seen headstocks that match the body color entirely, others that are black with only a matching trim, and still others with an entirely black face; some instruments have thumb rests while others do not; knob styles are used without rhyme or reason; some control plates on the back have four screws, some five. The most mysterious and well documented is the seemingly random range of serial numbers. (In *Gibson Electrics*, for instance, A. R. Duchossoir points out, "Numbers in the 80,000s were issued in 1962, while most numbers in the 60,000s appeared in 1963 and 1964.")

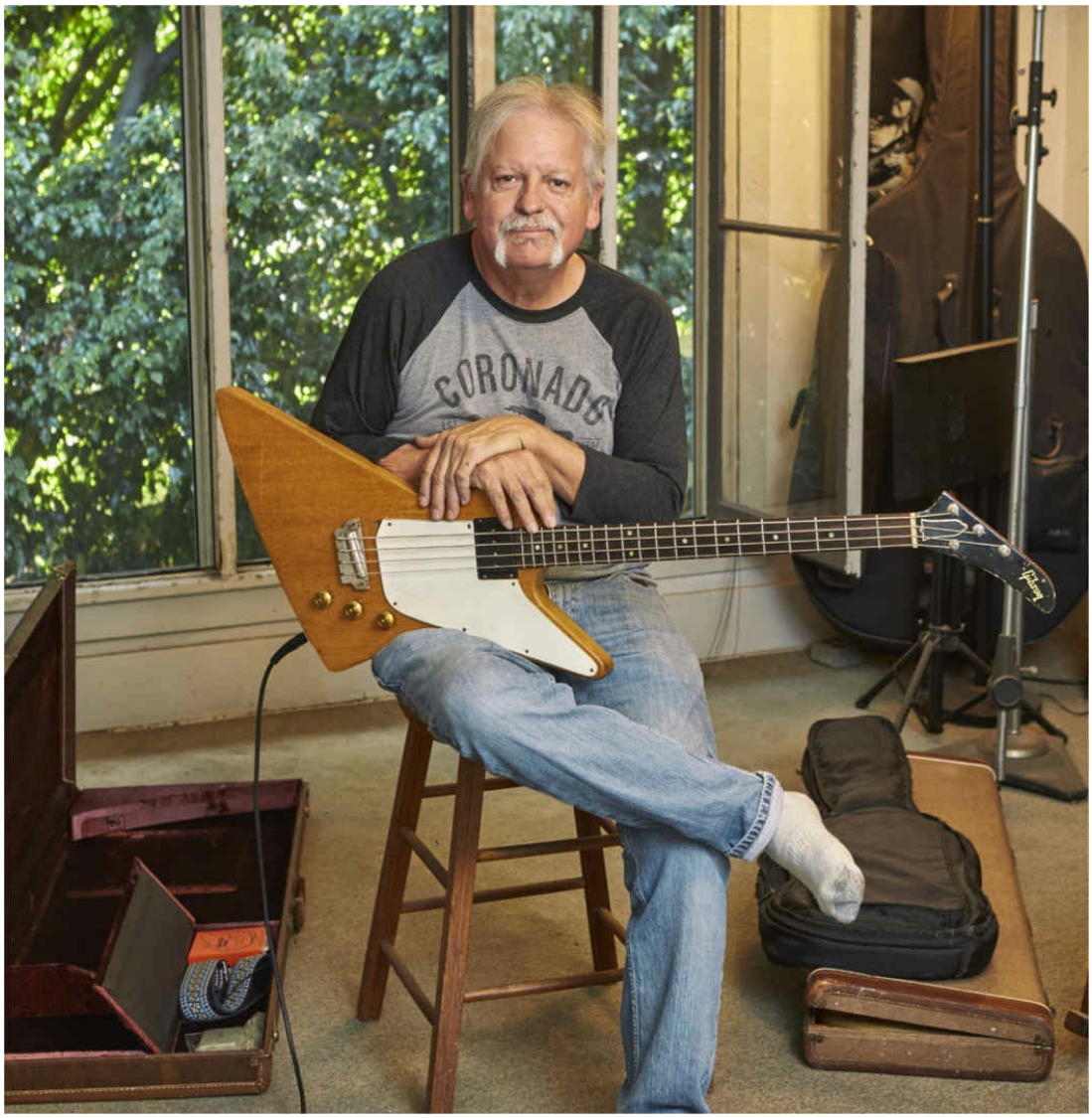
In our effort to accurately date my instruments, we've found a significant disparity in serial numbers versus dates on the pots. I have no doubt about the authenticity of any of my T-Birds, which possess completely untouched electronics and solder joints from the mid-1960s—yet a couple of them have serial numbers that register *after* production ended in 1969. One even has *two* serial numbers, one of which is all but meaningless. I can only surmise what was happening in the factory as production wound down, but in my view, with a release as unsuccessful as these, demand ebbed and flowed erratically, and it's likely that some unfinished instruments lingered in the shop until an order came through. But it's really hard to know.

Interview with

Ken Collins

Veteran collector, bassist, self-styled Fenderologist, and owner of the legendary Gibson Explorer Bass

LOS ANGELES, OCTOBER 5, 2017



Ken with the only known example of an Explorer Bass

GEDDY LEE: So, how old were you when we started playing bass?

KEN COLLINS: My mom came from Lima, Peru, and in her kit and caboodle I discovered an old Stella acoustic guitar with the dot lines silkscreened on the fingerboard, the old sunburst, and the remains of a charango, the actual real armadillo shell with the neck attached. The soundboard was gone, and there was no place to attach strings, and I'd pick it up and go, "What *is* it?" So I was really curious about music from early on. When I was twelve or thirteen, my dad finished a navy tour in Saigon and stopped in Hong Kong, and brought me home a Morris twelve-string acoustic guitar and a banjo, and a Teisco bass and a pack of Höfner

flatwound strings, because, of course, there was a fascination with Paul McCartney then. And from the beginning I was a singing bass player, because most of the bands I was in, people didn't want to sing.

GL: That's how all bass players become singers!

KC: Right! All my biggest influences ended up being singing bass players, including Peter Cetera from Chicago.

GL: So, your first bass was a Teisco.

KC: Japanese-made, short scale. Then in San Diego I bought a Sears Silvertone amp with the white panel and just a couple of knobs, which whenever you'd flip it off, as it was dying, it would make this electronic farting sound.

GL: [*Laughs*] I know that sound.

KC: So I had the Teisco until I met Robb Lawrence, who used to write the Rarebird column for *Guitar Player* in the 1970s, and I bought an EB-0 from him. Then I became really fascinated with Thunderbirds. Before my first Fender, I had five different T-Birds. Along the way, I got interested in the Embassy bass, but not being a really big guy, reaching out for that G tuner was like, you almost have to *lean* out there to get it. And they're almost all neck-heavy because the bodies are small. But, eventually, I became a dyed-in-the-wool Precision player. I love the transitional years of '59-ish and '64-ish, but '59 especially. I love the first slab board necks with the gold guards. I probably had four of those in Sunburst, until I finally found my Blonde one, which was the holy grail of P-Basses! It's right here.

GL: Yeah, the late '50s P-Basses are really special. This is the first Blonde I've seen with a rosewood neck.

KC: It's my favorite bass. I designed the thumb rest, and my dad, who's a master woodworker, implemented it for me. How many times have you seen a vintage bass where the original rest has been moved over? My idea was for something that can use the original screw holes.

GL: Oh, *good* idea!

KC: See. No damage at all. The bass itself is kind of beat, but ever since I picked it up, it almost began to play itself. I understood it was, like, the ghosts of all the players that have played it before are *in* here.

GL: Well, great basses just have "something" about them. . . . At what point did you decide you were going to be a collector of these things?

KC: I was a Directors Guild assistant director in TV, and going on location

and having per diems in my pocket, I liked to go to swap meets and walk around and be surrounded by old stuff.

GL: You had the gene.

KC: Yeah, it was just natural. Also, I love the community of collectors, and in the 1970s, way before cell phones and the internet, everything was done through ads and magazines, newsletters, poring over really old-time dealers' inventory lists. And guitar shows were really tribal gatherings—full of con men and slippery people, of course, but also organically interested people who loved the instruments. When I first started out, I could usually afford only modified instruments. Then I'd be cruising through some little town, and I'd go into a music store and try to locate the right pickguard or tuners or pickup, and that kind of chase was fun in itself. That's something that, I think, really is gone.

GL: I think you're right.

KC: The old Four Amigo shows in Dallas were legendary. I remember going there in '87, and there was a Blonde Strat that went for ten or fifteen thousand dollars, and everyone was losing their minds. It was the beginning of Strat mania, and then the Japanese descended on the thing, and nobody could really have anticipated the way it took off. It was bad for musicians because the people that most deserve to play these great guitars get priced out.

GL: It was an exciting time to be a collector—sort of the golden age for finding "golden age" guitars.

KC: Eventually my taste in instruments got better as my income grew. I had a '60 stack knob with the Blonde finish stripped off that I bought from a guy who played in a church. I played that bass for probably five years, and then an *original* Blonde stack knob came along and I went, "Oh yeah! Now it's time to upgrade."

GL: Can you talk about how you came to own the Tavares Jazz Bass, which I purchased from you?

Me playing Ken's '59 Blonde slab board P-Bass

KC: I want to say it was like '90—the year that Freddie died. And I happened to walk into Norman's shop, which is rare for me because it's in the West Valley. And he looked over and says, "Ken, you're a Blonde bass guy. Take a look at this!" It hadn't gone to his storage unit yet, and was still in the store. And so he opened the case and showed it to me along with the note from Freddie. Of course, I knew who Freddie was and I was like, "Okay, it's a deal!" And at the time it was like, "Oh, we got to dig a little deeper for this one." But, you know, as a collector there are certain instruments that rarely come along, and if you're somewhat knowledgeable you think, "I will not see another one for a long time." So, if you can, that's the time you step up.

GL: So, can you tell me how the Explorer came into your hands?

KC: The first time I ever saw it was at a guitar show in Texas. It was on a stand with a sign that said "Not for Sale." I knew about it because Robb Lawrence, whom I bought that EB-0 from in San Diego and who became a bit of a collecting mentor for me, told me how he'd bought the Explorer

Bass from Wayne Bullock, Lonnie Mack's bassist, in Cincinnati in about '71. It was painted in a metallic blue or green, I'm not sure which came first, but Robb stripped the bass and restored it to the natural korina finish. At the time it had three fleur-de-lis tuners and just one banjo tuner, and he restored all the banjo tuners too. Then Rick Derringer came around. Robb was showing it to a lot of people, including John Entwistle. I have a picture of John with it in a hotel room. And Jack Bruce saw it. And Rick Derringer, who was a real Explorer fan, talked Robb into selling the bass to his manager Steve, and Steve gave it to Randy Jo Hobbs, who was the original bass player for the "Hang on Sloopy" band, the McCoys, and later on played with him and Edgar and Johnny Winter. Randy Jo had it for a few years, and at a certain point he pawned it, apparently, on Music Row in New York to a family of guitar dealers, the Friedmans, and Steve Friedman used it on a couple of Lou Reed tracks at the time, on *Street Hassle*. Then the bass was in the window of this music store on Thirty-Fourth Street for a long time, until Tony Duke, a guitar player and dealer and a friend of Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top, bought it for a longtime collector named Byron Goad in Texas. Byron sold it in '95 to John Nelson, who was the most free-ranging of the LA dealers on Sunset, and played in Eddie Money's band. So, the *second* time I saw it was at the guitar show at the Santa Monica Civic, and John was asking fifty grand for it. The wheels were spinning in my head! I didn't have cash like that on hand, but I had a lot of instruments by then. So he came here to the house and we worked on a deal until four thirty in the morning. It was like being locked into the jury chamber with somebody! John's a good guy, but he's like a mole that gets in your collection, like, "What *else* you got?" He left with a '55 Blonde Strat, a '59 Blonde 335, a '61 Blonde Epiphone Sheridan with gold parts, a '65 Sonic Blue matching-headstock Jazz Bass, a mint '59 Tweed Deluxe, and a Blonde Gold Guard '59 P-Bass with a maple neck. But the bass was important to me because I knew the history. I dedicated myself to turning up information about it, because although it showed up in Duchossoir's Gibson book, very little had actually been written about it.

GL: So, to the best of your investigations, what do you believe to be the origin of that bass?

KC: Well, it was supposedly custom ordered by Roger Troy, the bassist and singer in the Electric Flag, in the late days of the band led by Buddy

Miles, and then peripherally with Lonnie Mack, but then claimed he couldn't pay for it. But Wayne Bullock spits on the ground whenever Troy's name is mentioned. He said to me, "He's a liar. He got kicked out of our band for stealing, and he never owned the bass." But the funny thing is, Troy once claimed that there's a *second* Explorer Bass—a Sunburst—and in a different context Robb Lawrence was told by Buddy, "Oh, I've seen the Sunburst one. I've got a Polaroid of it!" But Buddy died shortly after that and it's lost in the ether. So, it's possible. . . . Anyway, Wayne became my kind of private detective in Cincinnati, and one night he phoned me real excited and told me he was in a bar when some guy named Leon introduced himself and said, "You had my old Explorer Bass!" The story he tells is, in 1960 there was a black revue band, Otis Williams and the Charms, where the guitarist had an Explorer guitar and the bassist had ordered a matching bass from a store in Reading, Ohio—Biddles—but never picked it up for some reason. So this Leon says he bought it there, but didn't like it and exchanged it at Glenn Hughes Music in Cincinnati for a new P-Bass. And Glenn's is where *Wayne* bought it.

Jamming on basses from the early 1960s—Ken with a '61 stack

knob, me with a ’64 Foam Green Jazz with original parts

GL: Was it the natural korina at that time?

KC: Yes. I’ve got some stills of it with the band before Lonnie Mack went out on the road in the Econoline van that got wrecked in a really horrific accident in Iowa. It had the push button switch like the EB-2 does, and it has the capacitor underneath the bridge—all those features that it shares with the ’59, but not with the ’58. But meanwhile, I had a line on the Gibson factory production manager, Ray Juday, and I called him in Kalamazoo. His wife picked up and was like, “Well, I’ll put him on, but good luck. . . .” He had a bit of Alzheimer’s, and just barely even remembered there were korina guitars. But Wayne tells a story about going back to Gibson with Lonnie in late ’63, ’64, to talk about doing his Signature V. He swears the Explorer Bass was in the trunk of Lonnie’s Cadillac—in a homemade case that Wayne made for it, because it never had an original case. And when the guys in the factory showed him a Thunderbird and Wayne said, “Pretty nice. I’m just as happy with my Explorer Bass,” they were amazed that it was still around, and this elderly well-dressed guy came in from the back who they said was the one that put it together.

GL: Wow! What a saga!

KC: But when I met Lonnie, he disagreed with Wayne’s recollection of that trip and swore it never happened! Suffice it to say, after spending some time with them both I believe, for various reasons, that Wayne is simply a more reliable source.

GL: That’s quite a twisty tale.

KC: One other thing is, I talked to Walter Carter [the author of *The Gibson Electric Guitar Book*] about the Gibson ledgers, and wouldn’t you know it, there’s a gap! From, like, mid-1959 to partway through ’61, they’re just missing, misplaced or stolen or damaged, right at the time when it would have showed up. And I did talk to a former employee at the Gibson plant in Kalamazoo, and he talked about how they’d make forty guitars at a time—whether forty necks or forty bodies or whatever, that was the way that they did it. With the Flying Vs, it looks like there were maybe three runs of forty, up to a hundred and twenty instruments, and with the Explorers they only have *thirty-eight* they say came out of the factory. So I thought, *Okay, thirty-eight plus two Explorer Basses, right?*

GL: Is the body the same size as the guitar one?

KC: Identical. The bass was originally routed for double humbucking, and the switch routing goes up into the horn. The ferrules for the Tune-O-Matic guitar bridge are just under the pickguard, while the larger ones for the bass bridge are further down. But the pickguard famously has been trimmed a bit, and it just shows the guitar bridge ferrule. That's why on the website I'm careful to unmask all the secrets of the bass, all the things about it that are Gibson hallmarks. Personally, I would love it if the Sunburst Explorer Bass showed up. In a way it would validate everything.

For more information on the history of this instrument, check out Ken Collins’s Explorer Bass website: https://www.explorerbass.com/history

3

Rickenbacker

“I think the first three Rickenbacker basses were imported around 1964. Pete Quaife, the bassist for the Kinks, bought one. Then John Entwistle from the Who bought one. As for the third one, I asked the manager of the store if I could get an employee discount. He said I could, and so I picked up that one.”

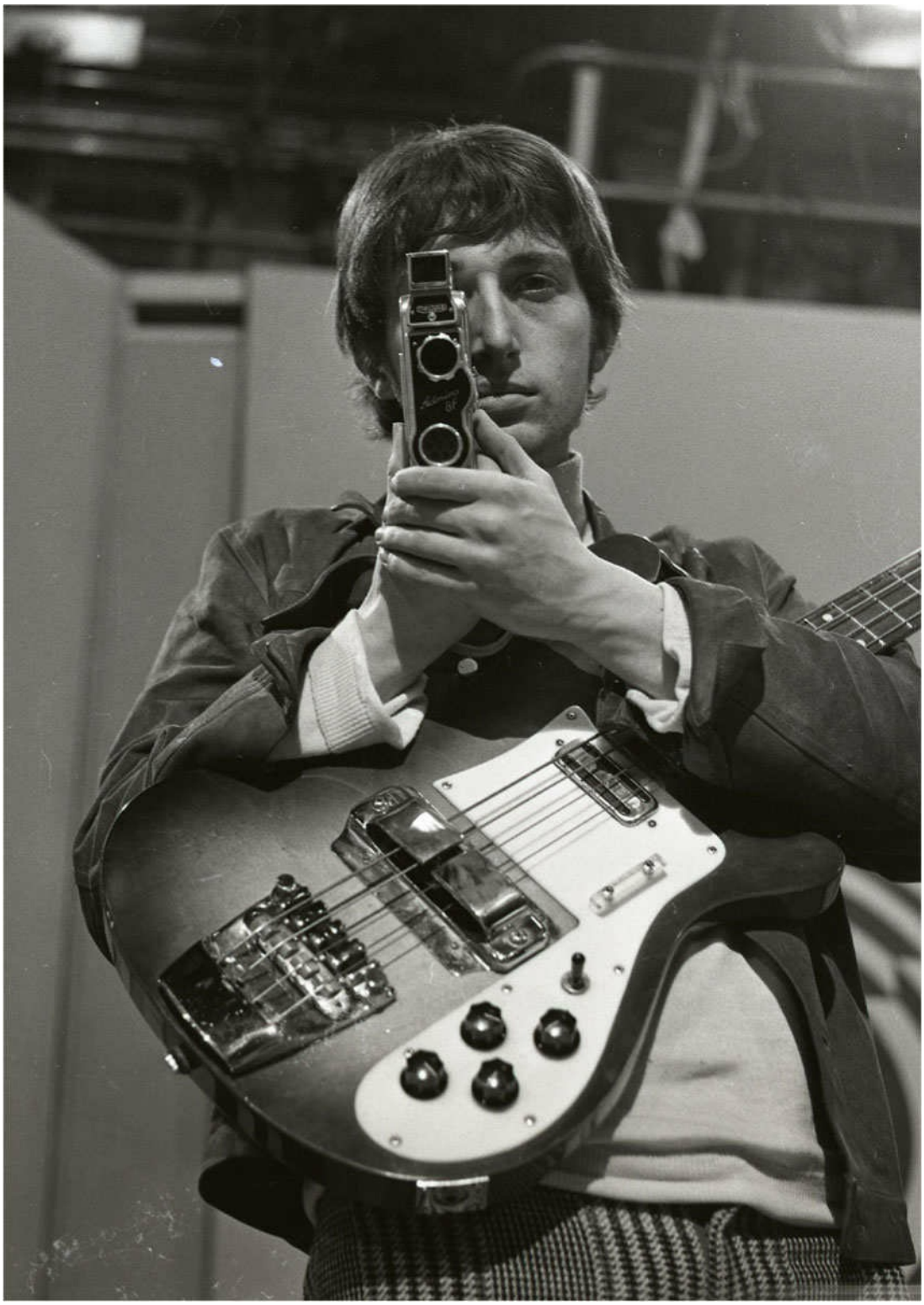
—CHRIS SQUIRE

My history with Rickenbacker begins with seeing the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love" international TV broadcast in 1967, an experience surely shared by innumerable other would-be musicians of my generation. Aside from the incredible melodies and full-on 1960s wonderfulness of that song, what really got my attention was the odd-looking, long bass thing that Paul was holding . . . my first sighting of a "Ricky" in the wild. I was only fourteen and I knew nothing about the various brands of bass guitar, but it sure didn't look like Brian Wilson's P-Bass. The "cresting wave" design of McCartney's fabulous 4001S had an otherworldly vibe to it.

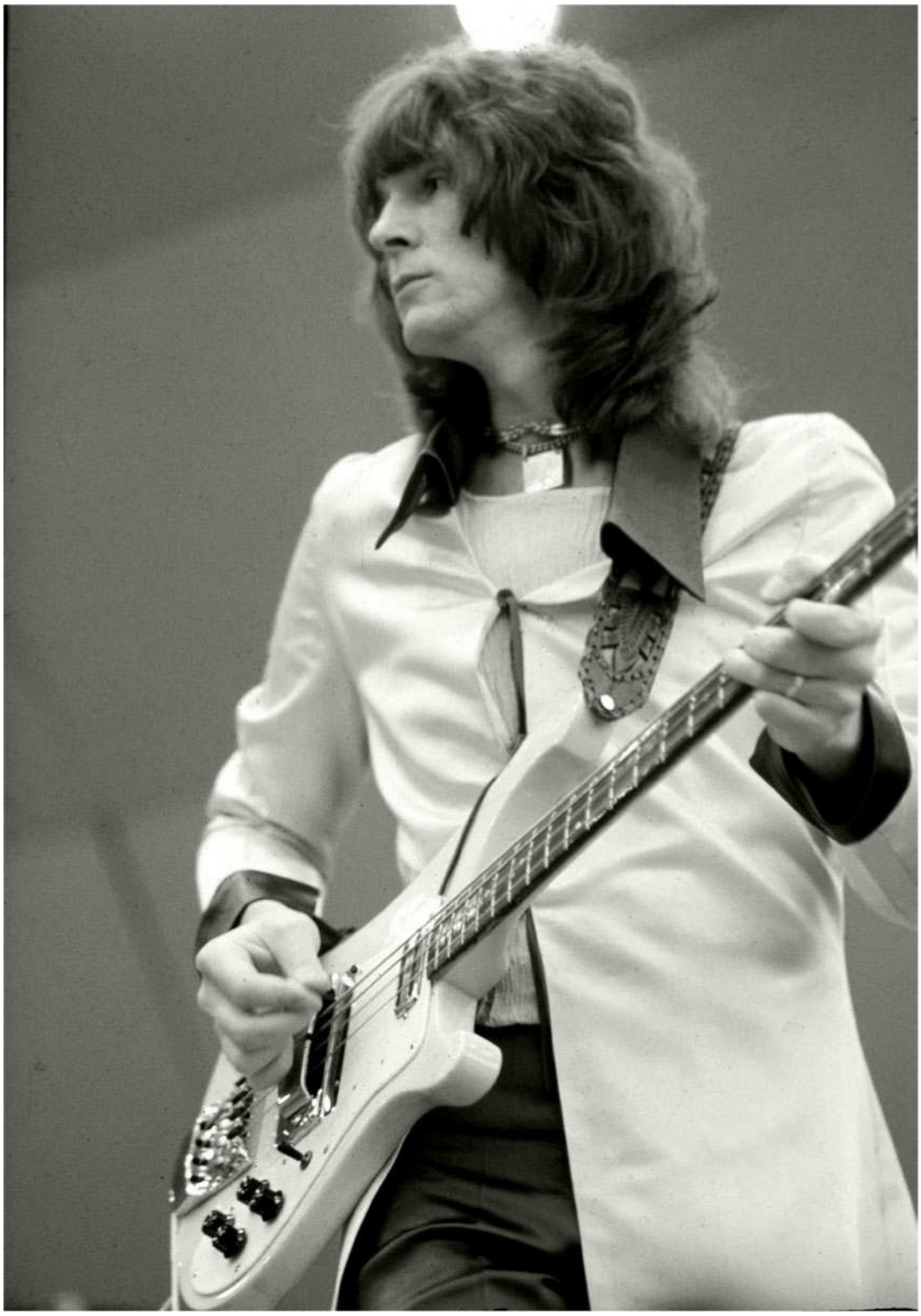
Fast-forward to the early 1970s and my first experience listening to a band my best pal Oscar turned me onto while taking an, ahem, "free day" off from high school. He cranked up his stereo, and out of the bedroom speakers stormed a remarkable song driven by an even more remarkable bass tone. Of course, the band was Yes; the song, "No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed." And I was blown away. From that moment on I was a diehard Chris Squire fan and needed to know everything about him and how he got that sound. And, oh yes, he played a RIC all right (it wasn't until much later that I learned it was actually the early UK import version of the 4001—a '64 RM1999), but I could only dream of one day owning one. This was a bass tone that brought so many sound experiments together for me: the clarity of the Precision Bass, the distortion of Jack Bruce's EB-3, John Entwistle's *twang* and *kerrang*! This was the tipping point, the sonic territory I knew I needed to move into.

Still, it wasn't until after I had signed my first record deal with Mercury in 1974 and had gotten my very first advance that I could afford to buy a Rickenbacker bass. I remember that day so clearly. I walked into the Long & McQuade music shop in Toronto, where they had some 4001s on the wall. I asked to play a few, fell in love with the black one, and *boom*. Sold! It was my new Number One, and I'd play that thing till the paint literally flaked off. In 1977, I got my second 4001, and not long after that I custom-ordered my first 4080 doubleneck. By then my image was solidly aligned with Rickenbacker basses, and despite the fact that I've used so many other basses throughout my career, to this day it's the instrument that people most associate with me.

The Beatles' *Our World* broadcast, with Paul McCartney and a glimpse of his Rickenbacker 4000S *(David Magnus/REX/Shutterstock)*



Pete Quaife of the Kinks *(tracksimages.com/Alamy)*



Chris Squire *(Michael Putland/Getty Images)*

Left to Right: The holy triumverate of early 4000s: Early 1960 Natural, 1961 Fireglo, later 1960 Natural

Rickenbacker

Solid Body

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RICKENBACKER

Adolph Rickenbacher and a former vaudeville performer and violinist named George Beauchamp founded the Ro-Pat-In Corporation in 1931 to sell electric Hawaiian guitars. Those Rickenbacher Electro instruments (later Americanized to Rickenbacker to avoid association with 1930s Germany) were nicknamed "Frying Pans" because of their long necks and circular bodies. We'd recognize them as lap steels, but they were, in fact, the first solid-bodied electric guitars.

"I have a handful of those," says John Minutaglio, our good friend, Rickenbacker collector, and invaluable consultant, "probably from the late 1920s. You date them by taking them apart. They stuffed the cavities with newspaper, so you know the date on the newspaper is when they made the instrument."

Rickenbacher sold his company (then called the Electro-String Instrument Corporation) to F. C. Hall in 1953, ushering in the era of Rickenbacker as we know it today. Even though work was begun back then on a fretted electric bass viol, it wasn't until after the introduction of its Spanish-style electric guitar, the Combo 600, that in 1957 Rickenbacker finally released its first official electric bass, the Model 4000.

ROGER ROSSMEISL AND THE CRESTING WAVE

From its inception in 1957, the 4000 series stood out from the competition with its innovations: cresting wave design, mahogany neck-through construction, and futuristic appointments. I found this surprising, considering that Rickenbacker had been a company making lap steels and traditional Spanish-style guitars. It was such a sudden leap into the future, it begged the question: who was in charge of designing these modern guitars and basses at Rickenbacker during this period? I asked John Minutaglio to give us some background info according to his experience.

"It's all Roger Rossmeisl at instrument development," says John. "He was hired by the owner, F. C. Hall, and was responsible for all the classic designs, including the cresting wave on the guitars and bass as well. He was a luthier by trade, having learned from his father (an accomplished guitarist who manufactured a brand of guitar in Germany called Roger), so there were European influences in a lot of what he did, like the German carve and details

like the checkerboard binding. Roger's fingerprints are all over everything that is cool about Rickenbacker—up until 1962, when he left for Fender."

Rickenbacker

Rickenbacker

Rickenbacker

This is interesting to me: The headstocks from the two Naturals (top and bottom) are only four serial numbers apart, yet they're strikingly different: the later one (on the bottom) has switched from an all-mahogany construction to a tilted maple headstock with walnut wings. This build is also seen on the '61 Fireglo (middle).

1960

Rickenbacker 4000

NATURAL

This is a super-early historical artifact, possibly the third or fourth bass Rickenbacker built in 1960. Compared with the later basses that I cut my teeth on, it seems quite embryonic. It's heavy as hell, and it has a surprisingly ballsy sound for the one old horseshoe pickup that's on it. I can't take it on tour—my back's still mad at me for taking out the doublenecks.

One-piece mahogany neck, and mahogany headstock wings. This version didn't last long, as you'll see.

Rickenbacker

1960

Rickenbacker 4000

NATURAL

Two heavy basses from 1960 (the earlier one is on the left in the body shot, on the right in the neck shot), yet they possess different body widths and contours, different wood for the neck and headstock construction, and have different headstock angles. Early days, figuring it all out . . .

THE HORSESHOE

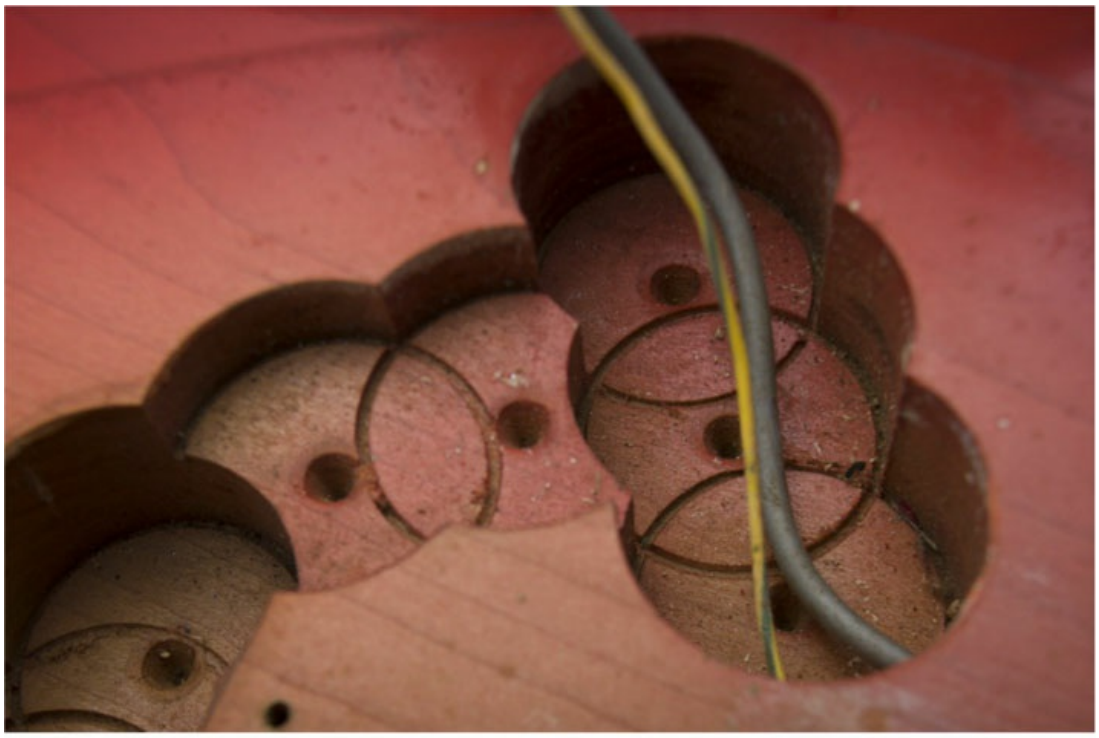
The familiar Rickenbacker Horseshoe pickup was first built in the late 1920s by George Beauchamp and a colleague of his, Paul Barth, at the National String Instrument Corporation, in an era when violas, banjos, and other stringed instruments were already being electrified. Its first-ever application was on the Frying Pan, and consisted of a pair of horseshoe-shaped magnets enclosing the pickup coil and completely surrounding the strings. In the 1930s, that same pickup made it onto Rickenbacker's early bass viol, a kind of bodiless upright with a modernist vibe. So there's a pedigree to the 4000, as it was equipped with a time-honored pickup.

Above and below: I just want to say one word to you: plastics. Rickys were changing so much in the early 1960s that it's almost like each instrument was a prototype, but one thing they did have in common were those really cool appointments that were so jet age: the glorious rear-painted gold pickguards and truss rod covers, the clear acrylic tug bars and innovative sliding bridge cover–mute assemblies. Most of these details disappeared shortly after Roger Rossmeisl left for Fender.

UNDER THE HOOD

Fascinating to look under the hood of a bass almost sixty years after it was built. The photographs below of the 1960 Natural (top) and the ’61 Fireglo (bottom) are fairly self-explanatory, except for one detail: the intriguing overlapping circular cuts in the pickup and control panel cavities, accomplished, as Paul Boyer describes in his helpful history of Rickenbacker basses, *The Rickenbacker Electric Bass: 50 Years as Rock’s Bottom*, “with multiple bores of a Forstner bit in a drill press.”

Stamped on every potentiometer is a six- or seven-digit standardized source code that tells who made the pot, as well as the week and the year. The pot on the left shows the sixth week of 1960.



For a short time, serial numbers appeared on the tailpiece.

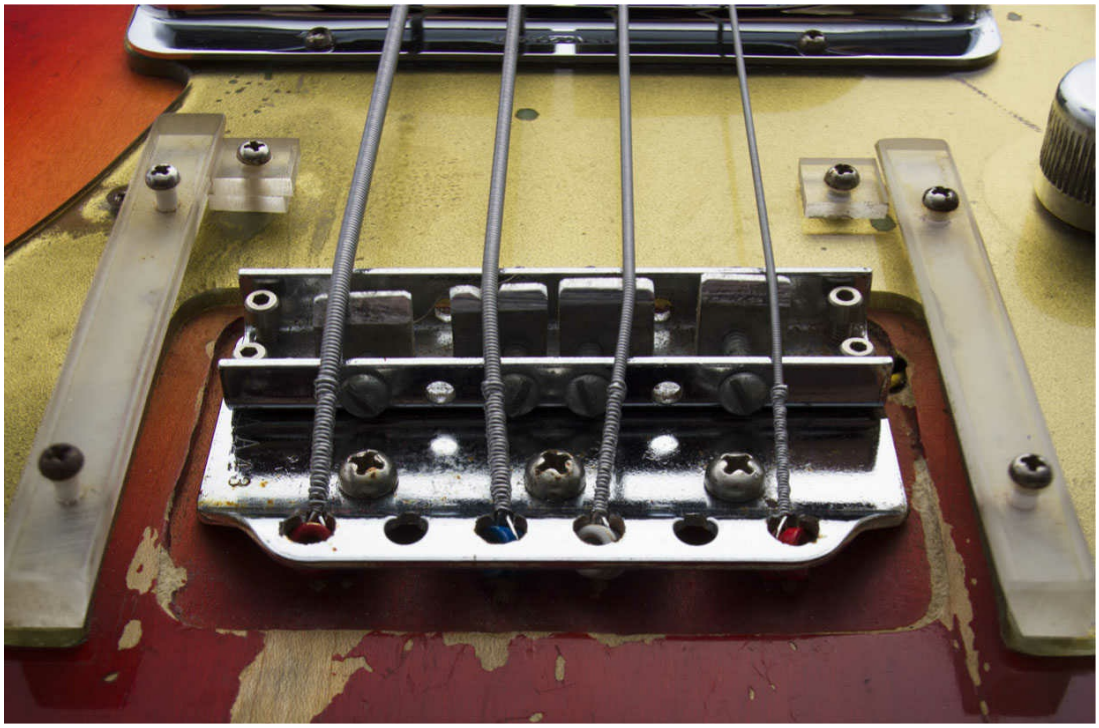
1961

Rickenbacker 4000

FIREGLO

This hard-livin’ wrangler walked into a guitar show in Texas where, thanks to our friendly spies alerting us to its presence, Skully snagged it within minutes. I got it at home, plugged it in, and, man, did it roar. A really powerful horseshoe pickup on this one.

Rickenbacker



Prior to the introduction of the dedicated cast aluminum bridge tailpiece in 1962, the basses used stock guitar bridges and tailpieces. The only modifications: two of the intonation screws and saddles were left off, and the four remaining saddles appear to be wider.

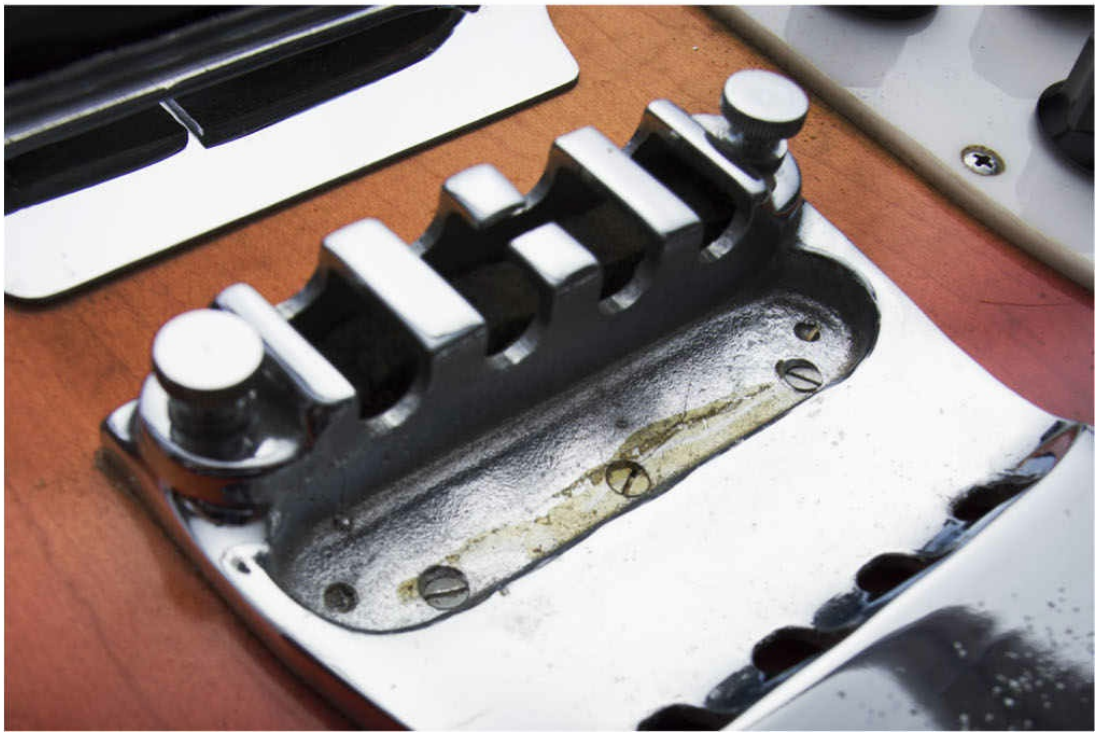
1964

Rickenbacker 4001

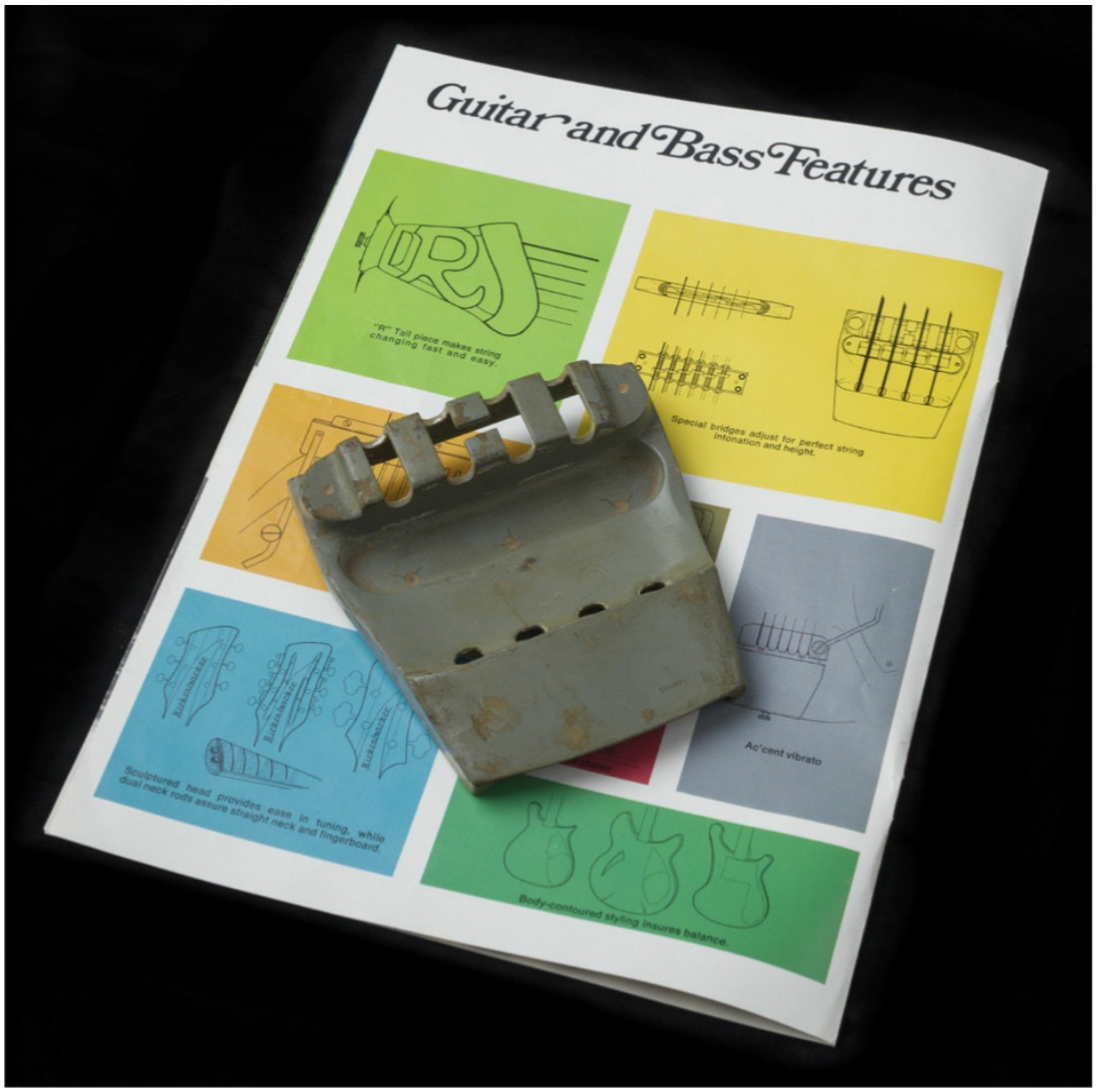
FIREGLO

Although 4001s started showing up in 1961, this ’64 is the earliest I’ve found, and you can see how different it is from the 4000s of the early 1960s. It’s sleeker, lighter, with the upper horn extended in an attempt to retain balance after reducing the body thickness. It has a completely new cast aluminum bridge and mute assembly, a toggle switch pickup selector, and my favorite combination of features: checkerboard binding; the chrome bar, or “Toaster,” neck pickup; the crushed pearl “shark fin” fret markers; and the time-honored horseshoe. Iconic.

Rickenbacker

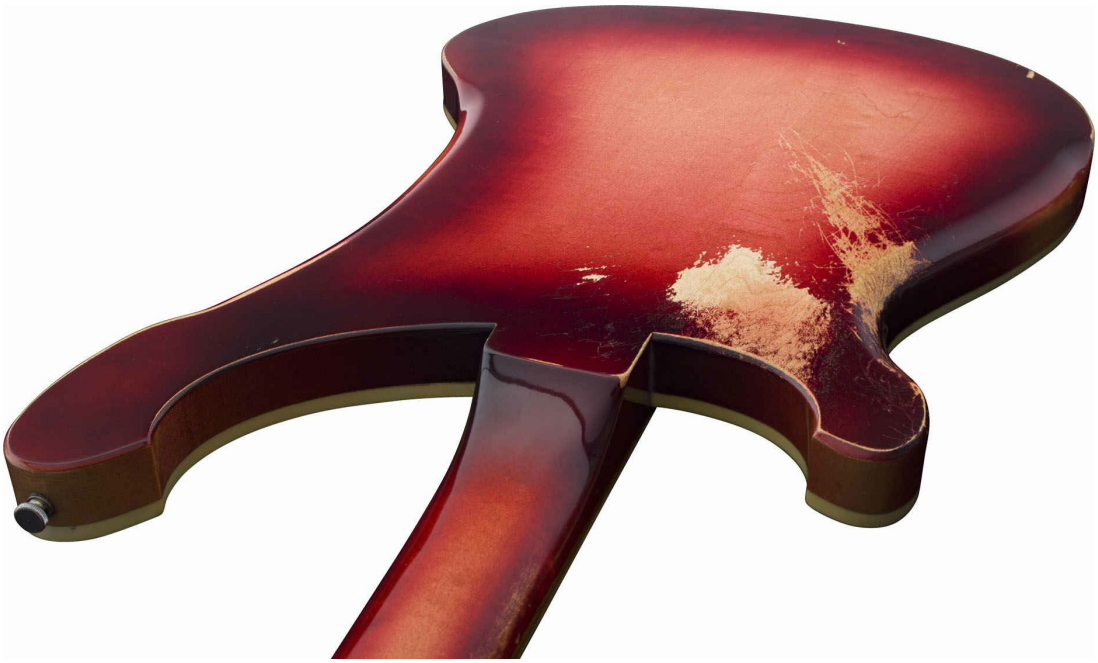


Here’s an up-close look at the cast-aluminum mute design of the 4001 tailpiece.


Guitar and Bass Features
"R" Tail piece makes string changing fast and easy.
Special bridges adjust for perfect string intonation and height.
Ac'cent vibrato
Sculptured head provides ease in tuning, while dual neck rods assure straight neck and fingerboard.
Body-contoured styling insures balance.

Here’s an interesting artifact, acquired from an ex-Rickenbacker employee, which looks to be an early and original carved balsa wood model of the tailpiece and mute housing.

This awesome-sounding bass has a great example of an early Toaster pickup: really deep bottom end, and loud. These first appeared on Rickenbacker guitars in the late 1950s and were slightly modified to suit the 4001. Toasters disappeared from this model sometime in 1973.



1964

Rickenbacker RM 1999 (4001S)

FIREGLO

The ’64 Rose Morris 1999 was the model famously favored in the UK by the likes of Paul McCartney, Pete Quaife, and Chris Squire. It’s a simpler-looking bass. The body has softer, contoured edges, eschewing the 4001’s checkerboard binding, and the neck features traditional dot fret markers instead of the crushed pearl shark fin inlays. The RM1999 was known in North America as the 4001S; the only way to tell which model you have is by looking at the original bill of sale, if you’re lucky enough to still have it.

Rickenbacker

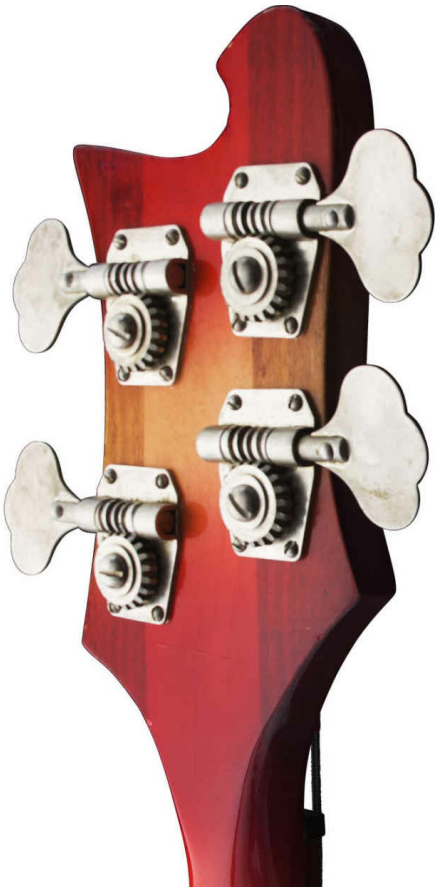
1967

Rickenbacker 4000

FIREGLO

Compare this ’67 4000 to its chunky-bodied predecessors of ’60 and ’61 at the beginning of this chapter, and you can see how elegant the model has become.

Rickenbacker



Left to right: Rickenbacker 4001 1968 Fireglo; 1964 Fireglo; 1968 Mapleglo; 1968 Fireglo; 1969 Fireglo

1968

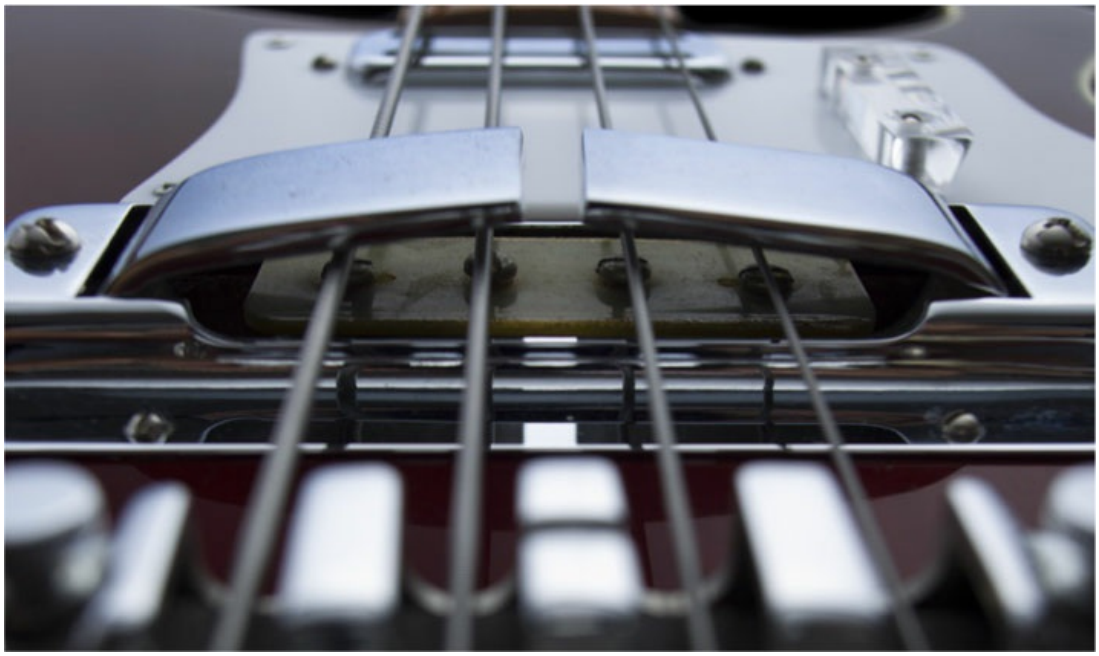
Rickenbacker 4001

MAPLEGLO

1968

Rickenbacker 4001

BURGUNDYGLO



I took this Burgundyglo on tour with me in 2015 and played it on “The Camera Eye.” I found its original horseshoe pickup (above) nuanced but lacking in output relative to the other basses in the show, so Skully replaced it with a modern high-gain horseshoe seen below with its faux-aluminum shoes

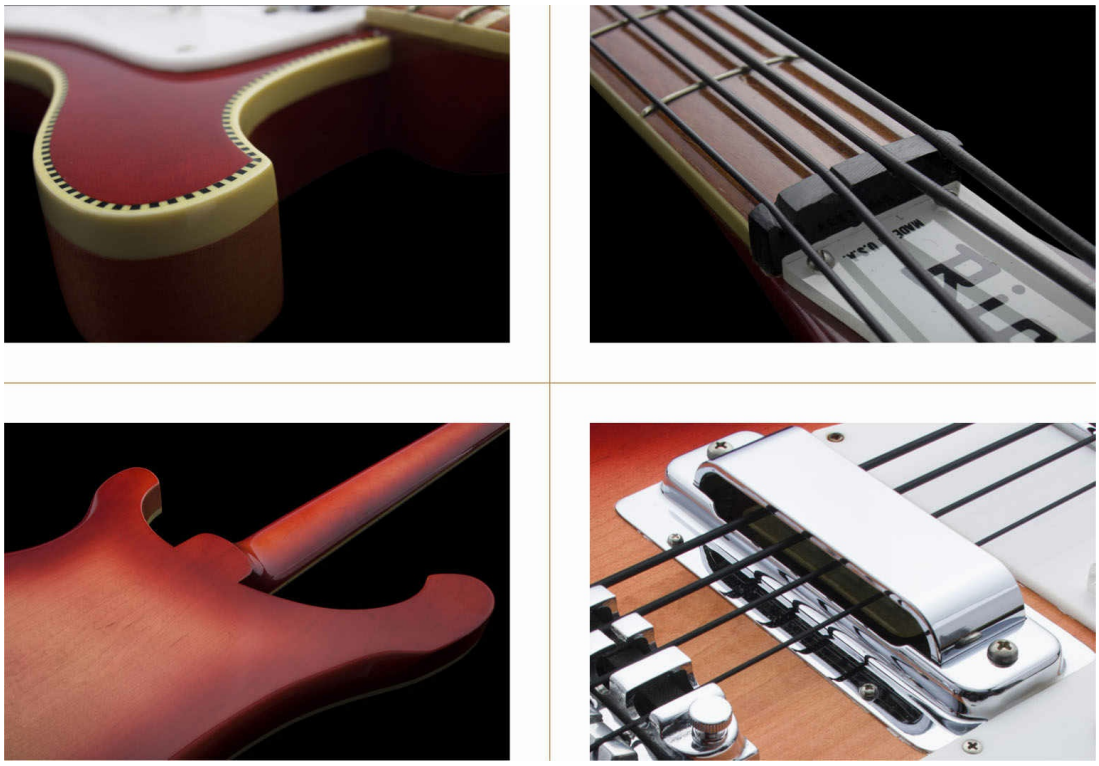
removed. The combination of that and the Toaster gave me a bolder yet classic Ricky tone: deep bottom plus twang. As it happened, in late 1968, Rickenbacker started replacing the veteran horseshoe with a more dynamic, high-gain pickup.

1968

Rickenbacker 4001

FIREGLO

A case queen I found in Toronto. This beauty still has its original strings, and I doubt that it’s ever been used for more than a few moments at a time—a bit sad considering how lovely it is to play. In fact, one thing that I especially like about Rickenbackers made in 1968/1969 is the way the necks feel: normal Ricky width, but with a nice shallow profile, which makes my hands happy.



The flared horseshoe surround is gone. (Gasp from the crowd.)

1969

Rickenbacker 4001

FIREGLO

Rickenbacker

This is an exceptionally luscious and dark Fireglo. Rickenbacker's Fireglo has such a wide range of variations that the dealer we purchased this bass from believed it to be "Autumnglow," an entirely different color, which dates back to Rickenbacker's guitars in the late 1950s and was not officially available for basses until at least 1973. (Guitars, yes; basses, not so much.) So Skully and I call it what it is: "an exceptionally luscious and dark Fireglo."

1972

Rickenbacker 4001
JETGLO

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

1972

Rickenbacker 4001

FIREGLO

1973

Rickenbacker 4001

AZUREGLO

The ’73 features one of the most awesome Ricky colors, Azureglo; it retains most of the features I love, but sadly gone are the crushed-pearl shark fin fret markers—replaced by triangular plastic insets intended to strengthen the neck, which had been compromised by the full-width style. Also in ’73, the new cast zinc bridge/tailpiece first appeared.

Toward the end of the 1960s, the Rick-O-Sound option was added to the standard mono output, allowing you to send each pickup signal to its own amp or processor.

In an effort to strengthen the neck, the one-piece neck-through construction was replaced in 1972 by a three-piece version with a center “skunk stripe” made of shedua.

End of an era, sort of. The ’72 and early ’73 were the last versions of the 4001 to feature my beloved checkerboard binding, Toaster pickup, and the always-fabulous “crushed pearl” inlays.

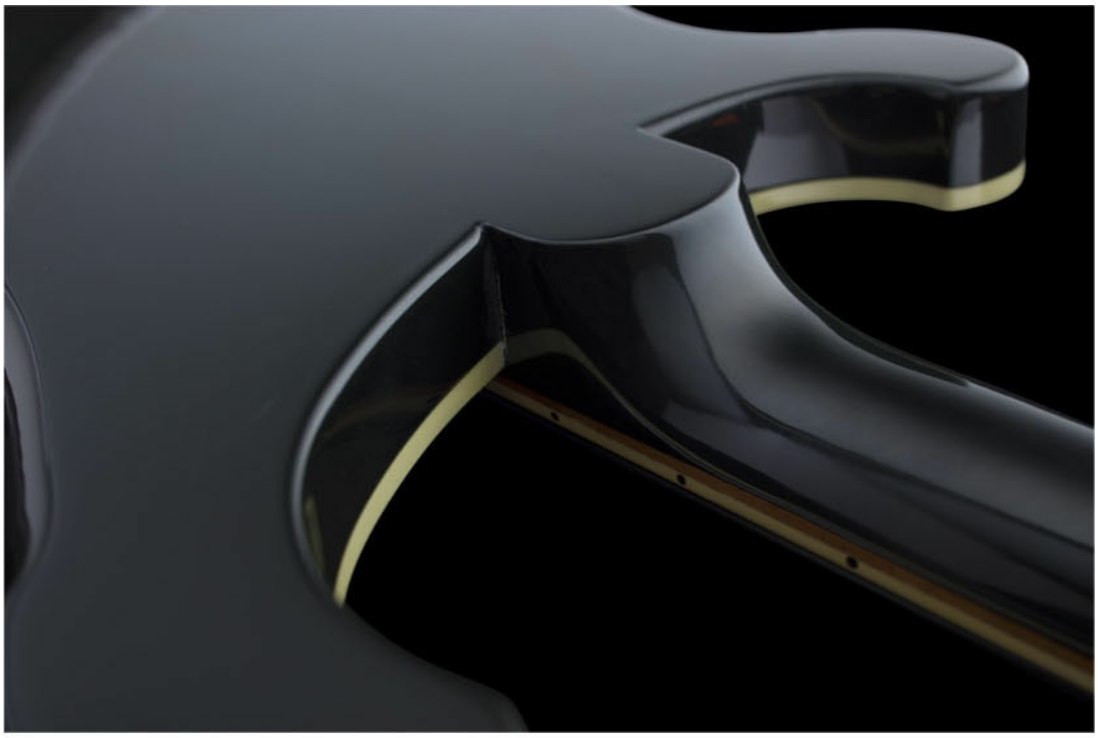
1977

Rickenbacker 4001

JETGLO FRETLESS

Obviously the most striking aspect of this instrument is the continuous, fret-free length of bubinga fingerboard. I didn’t have the heart to put roundwounds on it. I’ve used this bass sparingly and for recording only—in the late 1970s on “Madrigal,” if memory serves (which it usually doesn’t).

Rickenbacker
BADASS



By 1977, the Toasters were long gone, having been replaced in 1973 by a

high-gain neck pickup.

1977

Rickenbacker 4002

MAPLEGLO

I picked up this beautifully appointed 4002 from Rickenbacker on its release. It seemed to me to be a response to the new wave of active-electronics basses being made by companies such as Carl Thompson and Alembic. We don’t know exactly how few were made during its production between 1977 and 1984, but guesstimates put the number about three hundred.

This was a deluxe instrument for Rickenbacker. It featured beautifully chosen curly maple, a four-layer laminated pickguard, checkerboard and black binding, and a rare twenty-one-fret ebony fingerboard on its three-piece maple neck.

I played this bass onstage a couple of times, which is why it was modified with a Badass bridge below its two high-gain pickups.

Along with the regular and Rick-O-Sound outputs, this one also has a balanced XLR output.

Rickenbacker
BADASS

1976

Rickenbacker 3000

JETGLO

Rickenbacker’s budget line, released in late 1975. This 3000 is a short scale model, with a one-piece bolt-on neck with a twenty-one-fret bubinga fingerboard, a single high-gain pickup, Kluson tuners, and a headstock shape that’s a throwback to the mid-1950s Combo 400 Rickenbacker guitar.

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

1977

Rickenbacker 3001

WALNUT

This long-scale 3001 is similar to the one I used occasionally onstage in the late 1970s. It’s got a big, bassy tone that I dig, quite unlike any other RIC. But it is *shockingly* heavy, due to the thick solid-maple body. Like the 3000, it has a bolt-on maple neck, but with a shedua center strip and a twenty-fret bubinga fingerboard, a single pickup, the same tuners, and the same simple design—but a treble cut (like most guitars) and a bass cut control.

Me and my 3001 (and Alex)

1975

Rickenbacker 4080/12

JETGLO DOUBLENECK

(Restoration)

One of the earliest 4080s produced, this doubleneck began life as a bass/six-string Mapleglo, but it got so beaten up over time that it was begging for restoration, which was impeccably done by the noted RIC specialist Larry Davis, who converted it to a twelve-string and painted it Jetglo. I purchased both it and the ’78 Fireglo that you’ll see next for the song “Xanadu” on the R40 Tour.

R40 Tour, Las Vegas, 2015

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

1978

Rickenbacker 4080/12

FIREGLO DOUBLENECK

(Restoration)

This is the doubleneck that never was. Originally a beat-up 4080, it was restored and modified by Dale Fortune, an ex-RIC employee and a highly respected luthier. Inspired by Rickenbacker's past, Dale created and installed the full-width crushed-pearl inlays, the checkerboard binding, and the rear-painted gold pickguards and truss rod covers, making this bass a kind of Rickenbacker greatest hits collection, and a real one-of-a-kind. It's one of the most beautiful guitars I've ever seen, and I proudly brought it with me on the R40 Tour to play on the song "Xanadu." When the spotlight hit it, it was greeted with "oohs" and "aahs" from the audience.

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

We removed this faux-aluminum horseshoe in order for me to play it properly on tour. My right hand tends to hang out right near the pickup, and that beautiful shoe gets in my way!

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

Ooh! Ahh! R40 Tour, Toronto, 2015

As if two lovely necks weren’t enough, Dale Fortune also created this six-string neck to give the instrument maximum flexibility.

Top (left to right): ’75, ’76 *Bottom (left to right):* ’78, ’79.

Four 4080s, made between 1975 and 1979. There are slight differences in the body shapes and, on the earlier ones, quite a difference where the necks join the body: on the ’75, both necks are set much farther out from the bridge; on the ’78 and ’79, both necks have been moved in quite a bit; on the ’76, the guitar neck has been moved in like the ’78 and the ’79, but the bass neck appears to be halfway between those and the ’75. (See here and here for my two original doublenecks.)

Rickenbacker

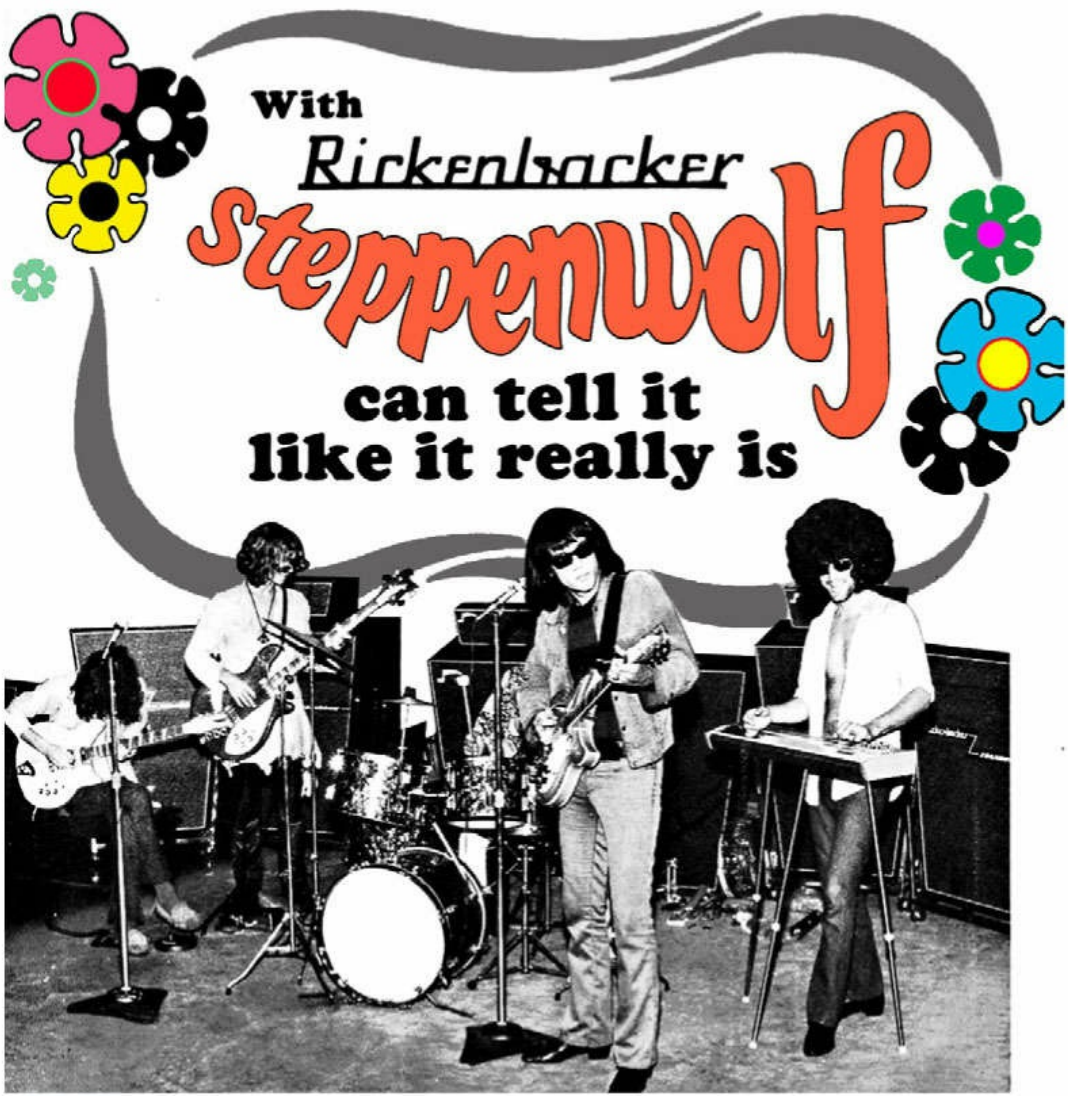
Hollow Body

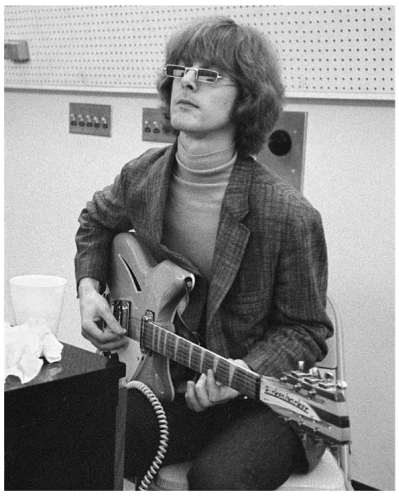
When I think of people playing Rickenbacker semiacoustic instruments, George Harrison and Roger McGuinn come to mind. Of course, neither one played basses, which are somewhat lesser known than their famous six- and twelve-string siblings, the 360s and 370s. More people, it seems, would rather collect these basses than actually play them. In fact, when I rack my brain for bassists I've seen actually gigging and recording with these beautifully sculpted 4005s . . . only Steppenwolf 's Nick St. Nicholas and, of course, the ubiquitous John Entwistle come to the fore. 'Ello, John! Thanks

for popping by, *again*.

Oh, and speaking of the Ox, he played not only a 4005, but also one of the very few 4005L Lightshow basses ever made, making it the rarest of all Ricky beasts (the whereabouts of only three in the world are known).

Nonetheless, they definitely have their own distinctive character. They're well-crafted instruments and were made only in small numbers, so their collectibility has gathered steam through the years. I brought my '67 RM3261 Fireglo out on the R40 Tour—the first and only hollow-body bass I've ever used in concert—to play on "Closer to the Heart"; it sounded round and warm, with *juuust* enough definition, and I loved it. Naturally, I then felt the irresistible urge to collect some more. Considering how beautiful they are, I think I behaved with a measure of restraint. (Not!)





Left: Roger McGuinn, 1965, in Los Angeles, with his Rick

Right: John Entwistle playing a 4005 Fireglo at The Beat Club in 1969

1966

Rickenbacker 4005WB

FIREGLO

This Fireglo WB is beautifully double bound, which makes it extremely rare. It has a top with cornered edges and white strip binding on both sides of its hollow maple body. Like other 4005s of this period, it has a laminated maple and mahogany neck; two Toaster pickups are mounted to the top; strings run over the bridge to a cast-R tailpiece; a fifth blender pot on the control panel adjusts the pickup mix. This model was produced in tiny numbers from 1965 to 1983. (By the way, WB means “with binding.”)

Rickenbacker

1966

Rickenbacker 4005

MAPLEGLO

1967

Rickenbacker 4005

FIREGLO

1968

Rickenbacker 4005

BURGUNDYGLO

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

1967

Rickenbacker RM3261

FIREGLO

This is the “Closer to the Heart” bass that I mentioned at the start of this section. Rose Morris imported these basses for European musicians, and according to collector John Minutaglio, only two have been seen in North America—the other one belonging to him. John says he knows of only

another six in existence, anywhere. How cool is that?

Production hieroglyphs: apparently, Griselda was here.

RICKENBACKER'S EUROPEAN DISTRIBUTOR

UK-based Rose Morris was Rickenbacker's exclusive distributor for instruments in the UK and Europe between 1964 and 1969. It used its own model numbers, and the only significant difference in style was that rather than using the standard cat's-eye sound hole, it preferred an F-hole for its basses. In Richard Smith's book *The History of Rickenbacker Guitars*, Roy B. Morris (son of Rose, Morris & Co.'s co-founder, Victor), explained this change, saying that in England there was a great demand for "a more traditional and elaborate design like Gibson and Gretsch."

LIFE
TITO—AGAIN A RUSSIAN HERO
THE SOUTH'S FAVORITE SON
Britannica

Guitarchitecture! *Left to right:* 1966 RM1997 guitar and 1967 RM3261 bass

1967

Rickenbacker 4005/6

FIREGLO

A 34"-scale monster tuned an octave below a guitar, this was Rickenbacker’s foray into the world of the six-string bass. Few were made, but Jeff Tweedy of Wilco has one; he proudly showed it to me when I met him at the Loft in Chicago.

Rickenbacker

1967

Rickenbacker 4005/8

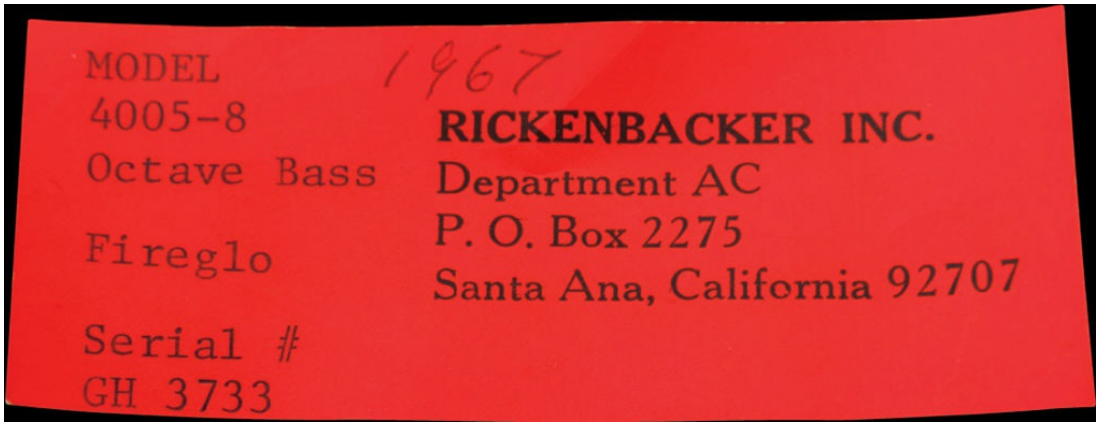
FIREGLO

I’m really pleased to own this über-scarce instrument for a couple of reasons: first, I’d seen photos of Chris Squire using one and, second, it sounds really good. In my early days as a bassist I fooled around with a Hagstrom eight-string, among others, but these things always sound better with a pick, which I don’t like to use, so I never recorded with them. However, *this* bass sounds so clear and melodious, and plays so well even *without* a stupid plectrum, that

I’m hoping to put it to good use in the near future.

Rickenbacker

Another production hieroglyphic. Hello, Carol!



These labels infrequently appear glued inside hollow-body instruments, primarily in uncommon or “special” models. They often fall out, but fortunately, this label stayed with the bass.

The tailpiece is the standard four-string “R” type, but modified with four extra slots cut for the octave strings.

The famed “potato head” headstock. Such a weird, undulating shape, but ingenious in the way Rickenbacker positioned the guitar tuners for the octave strings in between the standard bass tuners.

1970s

Rickenbacker 4005L

“LIGHTSHOW BASS” BURGUNDYGLO

Fender responded to the Age of Aquarius by releasing its Paisley and Blue Flower Telecaster basses. And Rickenbacker? Well, it seems they dropped acid and invented the Lightshow. Probably the weirdest and most cumbersome of all basses to play, but it’s just too much fun!

John Entwistle performing “Peg Leg Peggy” on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in 1973 *(Michael Putland/Getty Images)*

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

PAT. PEND.

292
JK

TONE
TREBLE
VOLUME
BASS
VOLUME
TREBLE

Me and John M. on the Clockwork Angels Tour *(Skully)*

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

Here's what collector and fellow Lightshow owner John Minutaglio has to say about the rarity of the Lightshow bass:

"There aren't a lot of Rickenbacker instruments that have ambiguity and mystery, but the Lightshows do. Probably sixty to seventy guitars were made, and three to six basses—all of them different and all of them weird. One I know about went to Japan. There's yours. I have one, which was made in the 1960s, but sat in the factory for twenty years before I got it. And there's supposedly one or two others, but they're nowhere to be found.

"The myth goes that the professional musicians who got them back in the day may have been friends of F. C. Hall, but nobody knows for sure. Jefferson Airplane and the Byrds each supposedly had one, but I asked Roger McGuinn and Chris Hillman, and they said no—if they did, they'd remember. Then there was a Vegas showgirl band, the Kimberley Diamonds, who had two Lightshow guitars and a bass. The bass had high-gain pickups like mine. It turned up later as a hulk in a pawn shop in Albuquerque and was restored and painted Jetglo by Rickenbacker, and that's the bass that currently resides in Japan. John Entwistle's, meanwhile, which had Toasters like yours, is nowhere to be found. Where it went is a real mystery. And the third I'm not sure even exists.

"The cool thing about yours is the photo that came with it, of the guy in a country-and-western band. That's proof it's not just something that was pieced together later. I can't believe that you found it! I was trying to buy it, too, so I'm kind of pissed off!

[*Laughs*] But, congrats, it looks great.”

The previous owner of my Lightshow, workin’ it

Let’s get high! Early 1970s Lightshows: Rickenbacker 331 guitar;

4005L bass

The circuitry is essentially a color organ that doesn’t work that well. With extreme high and low notes, there’s some variation as to which lights turn on, but most of the time they all come on. Why would you want anything less?

Interview with

Robert Trujillo

Bassist with Metallica and Suicidal Tendencies, film producer, surfer, and savior of Jaco Pastorius's Bass of Doom

LOS ANGELES, OCTOBER 4, 2017

Robert holding Jaco's Bass of Doom

GEDDY LEE: What are your earliest memories of music?

ROBERT TRUJILLO: I was fortunate to have parents that were young enough to turn me on to a lot of different styles. My earliest memory of someone actually playing an instrument was my father playing flamenco, which was his hobby. The finger style he was using is what I naturally gravitated towards. Rather than playing with a pick, I play with my fingers because that's what I saw. My mother was really into Motown, so I remember listening to a lot of Marvin Gaye. *What's Going On?* in particular blew me away. I didn't really know it at the time, but James Jamerson's bass was the prominent instrument that was luring me in and

taking control of me. Then I gravitated towards funk rock bands, like the Ohio Players, and a lot of Sly and the Family Stone with Larry Graham and the slap and popping that he basically invented. At first I wanted to become a drummer, but we lived in an apartment and I couldn't bang around on a drum kit, but a friend of my dad's had a Harmony bass, this big, crazy instrument with the action an inch and a half off the fretboard, which I could hear because it was a hollow body.

GL: How old were you then?

RT: Probably fourteen or fifteen. I played that thing for a year and just did scales, just the basics. The first couple of basses I had were hand-me-downs, with pickups that didn't work. But my father and I used to refinish instruments and amps, because he was a carpenter, and then trade them up for something better. I remember getting a Gibson SG bass and a Jazz Bass—they were copies, but they were the first instruments I had that I actually worked through an amp.

GL: And when did you start to do gigs?

RT: Here in Southern California with the nice weather and living by the beach, it was all about backyard parties—somebody's seventeenth birthday or whatever. I was in a cover band called Oblivion that played "La Villa Strangiato" and "YYZ" and Zeppelin and Van Halen. I remember we'd play to, like, fifty people, but it was as exhilarating as playing a sold-out arena gig today. I realized that I wanted to study music, so I went to a jazz school called the Dick Grove School of Music, in Studio City. My first teacher, Max Bennett, played on the Joni Mitchell records just before Jaco, and after him was a real blingy old swinger-type guy called Joel DiBartolo—East Coast, hard-core Fender guy who played with Doc Severinsen and the Tonight Show Band.

GL: How did your style evolve through those various teachers?

RT: The main thing I took to the streets from that school was the jam sessions I had with the wonderful musicians at that school. At first I was very R&B and funk driven, then started to discover fusion—Stanley Clarke and all those guys. Then there was a keyboard player I wrote with who played with that gal Teena Marie from Venice . . . what was that song? I remember the bass line, *doo doo doo doo* . . . "Lovergirl"! He really taught me about funk. I started a band that was really influenced by Level 42. I was barely making money then. I did construction work, a lot of drywall and hardwood floors—you know, stuff that a musician

shouldn't be doing!

GL: But you gotta pay the bills!

RT: But then I got a call to jam with Suicidal Tendencies, with Rocky George, a guitarist I knew from junior high who I used to see a lot of concerts with at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium—the Stones and John McLaughlin and Weather Report—and he says, "We're going to Europe. It's our first arena tour, we're opening for Anthrax and it's a big deal," and he offers me the gig, but I almost didn't go! I was like, "I got my own band now." Then I was talking to a teacher of mine who said, "*I'll* take that gig! I'm playing with Barry Manilow right now and Vegas is driving me nuts. I'd *love* to headbang with Suicidal!" That's when I called Rocky back and said, "Yeah, I'll come down." And really it was Suicidal Tendencies that set me free, where I didn't have to work a day gig anymore.

GL: That's a huge moment.

RT: Yeah. We opened for Guns N' Roses and Metallica. And soon after that, I started Infectious Grooves with Suicidal's lead singer, Mike Muir, which was about writing songs that revolved around the bass. There were no rules: "Let's be speed metal here, let's be ska, let's channel the Sex Pistols, Sly and the Family Stone, too." It was a melting pot, a potpourri of styles. We recorded at Devonshire, the same place as Weather Report and Earth, Wind & Fire, and when we were there Ozzy was doing his *No More Tears* album in the same studio. He'd hang out, and he sang on a song called "Therapy," and that's how I ended up playing with him a few years later.

GL: So, what instruments were you playing at that point?

RT: I played a Fender P-Bass with the anodized pickguard; that was my first real instrument. But then I started looking at things for aesthetic reasons and I made some bad decisions. I traded it for a Kramer with the aluminum neck and the wood finish, which I was drawn to because it was new. But it sounded horrible! After a couple of years, I traded it for an Ibanez Musician, which I could kind of get that staccato punchy back pickup sound that Jaco had. And then I saw a Factor Bass and thought, "That looks cool," and I cut up the Ibanez and stripped and repainted it, put on new gold hardware, Schaller pegs, and a bridge with a whammy. "The Face-lift," I called it. It just got ridiculous. And I destroyed the bass. It never sounded the same.

GL: You're not a bass player if you haven't destroyed at least one!

RT: But then the first night I played it at a pub gig, it got stolen! The guy who took it eventually returned it to me, after he became a born-again and got a guilty conscience, but in the meantime I was forced to learn to play a fretless Musicman that I had, and a five-string Tobias bass. So I always believe things happen for a reason. I started to learn about different bass personalities. Like, I prefer playing a four-string, and my favorite sound is the Fender sound, but with Metallica we do a blindfold test where we'll record a section with maybe eight basses, and choose whichever sounds best for the song. On most of Jerry Cantrell's solo album *Degradation Trip*, I used a P-Bass and the Tobias, but also a Danelectro with a muddy, flatwound vibe for a ballad-type song, because it had the right personality.

GL: For sure, it's disappointing when you have your heart set on a certain bass but can't get the right noise out of it for the track. But you have to provide the tone that the song wants. Do you have a go-to instrument in the studio or live?

RT: I mean, my favorite bass sound *is* the Fender Bass sound. Again, you have a song, and the song has a personality and you want to cater to that personality. Sometimes with us we need something that's really hot, and the low register has to be that cushion that sits and holds the song together. And live, too, I use Fenders for a lot of the older songs.

GL: Now, let me ask you about your incredibly extreme low-slung style of

playing. Did you always play like that?

RT: No, no. I started playing the opposite. I had the bass very high, like Mark King of Level 42. But at a certain point with Suicidal, the strap length wasn't comfortable for me to execute those bass parts and have that stamina, and my hand and forearm would cramp. I remember the singer said, "It's really cool when bass players play low!" so it started getting lower and lower until it was ridiculously low. It works with Metallica, but then if there's a part coming where I'm going to have to get higher on the fretboard or whatever, I'll take a knee or figure out a certain body position on stage that will work. A lot of the physicality stems from when I grew up skateboarding and snowboarding, and I still surf. That's the kind of energy I have.

GL: So, let's talk a little about Jaco's Bass of Doom. How did it come to you?

RT: Well, I first saw Jaco play in 1980 at the Playboy Jazz Festival. I'd heard about this guy everybody was excited about, but it was before the Internet, so nobody knew what he looked like. It was like when you heard Eddie Van Halen for the first time on stuff like "Eruption" and you went, "What instrument is that?!" With Jaco on "Portrait of Tracy" I'm hearing harmonics, almost like a Fender Rhodes, with all these chords and melody through it. And "Teen Town" blew me away because it was so aggressive. The instrument almost had a growl to it. Then when I saw him play live at the Santa Monica Civic I was *really* blown away because I see this guy with long hair who reminds me of my surfer buddies that I grew up with down on Venice Beach. He's running around the stage that he'd sprinkled with baby powder and slid into his bass like it was home plate. The bass is melodic, it's got distortion, he's soloing with the digital delay and quoting Hendrix, all that stuff. So right away I realized, hey, it doesn't have to be the guy in back holding it down. Bass can be many things!

GL: Yeah, Jaco had that impact on a lot of us bassmen. . . .

RT: So, in 1996, a weird thing happens. A friend of mine I used to surf with was a bartender in Fort Lauderdale, and one day he looks at the driver's license of a guy who's buying a round of drinks and thinks, "That name sounds familiar." He tells the guy, "I have a friend who talks about a bass player called Pastorius. He's even got pictures of him on his wall—some guy called Jaco?" And the guy goes, "Yeah, that's my dad." And it evolves from there. I met him when I was on tour with Ozzy's band, and

one of the first things I said was, “Someday you got to make a film about your father!” And eventually I basically adopted it. I became the producer. It took six years, every single day, every single day. It’s been out for two years already and I’m still paying for licensing cues!

GL: It’s a great film, by the way.

RT: It’s a dream come true in a lot of ways, but at the same time, with every dream there’s a bit of a nightmare. You’re passionately taking on somebody who’s no longer alive. And within the first six months there was the situation with Jaco’s bass, the one he had recorded with Weather Report—I mean, “Teen Town,” all the great songs—and which had been stolen while he was still alive. A collector in New York had somehow gotten ahold of it, and Jaco’s family was freaked out and there was an ongoing legal dispute.

GL: It had been stolen from where?

RT: There are different rumors as to what had happened. Jaco was in a bad way, living homeless in New York City. He would give the bass away for a case of beer, and someone would have to pay some guy ninety bucks or whatever to get the bass back for him. It was like he had this love-hate relationship with it. This is the bass he used to throw about on stage, and sometimes they’d catch it and sometimes they wouldn’t. Then, some say, Jaco threw it down a flight of stairs in a fight with his girlfriend. And Jaco calls this guy in Florida named Kevin Kaufman who was his luthier and also his bass tech, and says, “I’m not happy with my bass,” and when Kaufman receives it, it’s in a box, broken into like fifty pieces. I mean, no wonder it has a personality—all that love and energy and destruction! And it has a very unique sound. The neck is maple, but there’s a whole epoxy process from these guys down in Florida who work with boat epoxies. Kevin goes to work on it, and it’s like an Oreo cookie: all the gouges and the cracks were refilled, and there’s a sugar maple veneer on the front and the back of both sides of the body. The neck had to be re-reinforced, same process again, sugar maple on both sides of the headstock. And Jaco wanted it painted black, but before it was finished he wanted it back. He was really excited because he was doing this session for the Mike Stern album *Upside Downside* with Steve Jordan, Bob Berg, all these great players. He’s back into it. And this is where it becomes a gray area, what exactly happened. There are rumors he fell asleep in the park, or he left the bass there to get something to eat,

and someone took it. You can't just leave a bass in Washington Square Park! So the bass goes missing for twenty years, and somehow this collector in New York got ahold of it. He calls Kevin in Florida to try and see if it's really Jaco's, and Kevin says, "Well there is one thing. . . ." He'd worked on the rebuild with a guy called Jim Hamilton, who worked with Stevie Ray Vaughan at one point, and after one too many drinks or something, Hamilton misspelled "Florida" on the headstock. . . .

GL: And that's how the bass was authenticated?

RT: That was the dead giveaway! So anyway, all that was really being accumulated from this was attorney's bills, and at the time I had the money to help. I secretly sponsored the money for the family to get the bass back, and I became its legal owner. The movie had not been made yet, so there was the immediate idea out there that this bass player from this heavy metal band called Metallica having anything to do with the bass was, like, sacrilegious, but it's cool now. The majority of the music score is Jaco and Weather Report, but my writing partner Armand Sabal-Lecco and I did some of the transitional music, and Jaco's bass is there. The energy of that bass has a presence throughout the film. It's almost like it's a contributor to this documentary. But, you know, it has a certain strange energy. When we were in the studio, weird things would happen. Doors would slowly open or shut. And then a couple years ago I was at a Miles Davis photo exhibition, and some guy was saying, "A friend of mine worked for the collector who had that instrument in New York. And he swears that bass is haunted. . . ."

GL: The ghost in the machine heads! Good on you for doing right by it. . . . Now, can I *play* it?

WEATHER REPORT
GROUP
LOS ANGELES USA

Custom rebuilt for JACO PASTORIUS
by Kevin Kaufman & Jim Hamilton
West Palm Beach, Flordia
February 1986

Robert’s Ibanez Musician “Facelift”

4

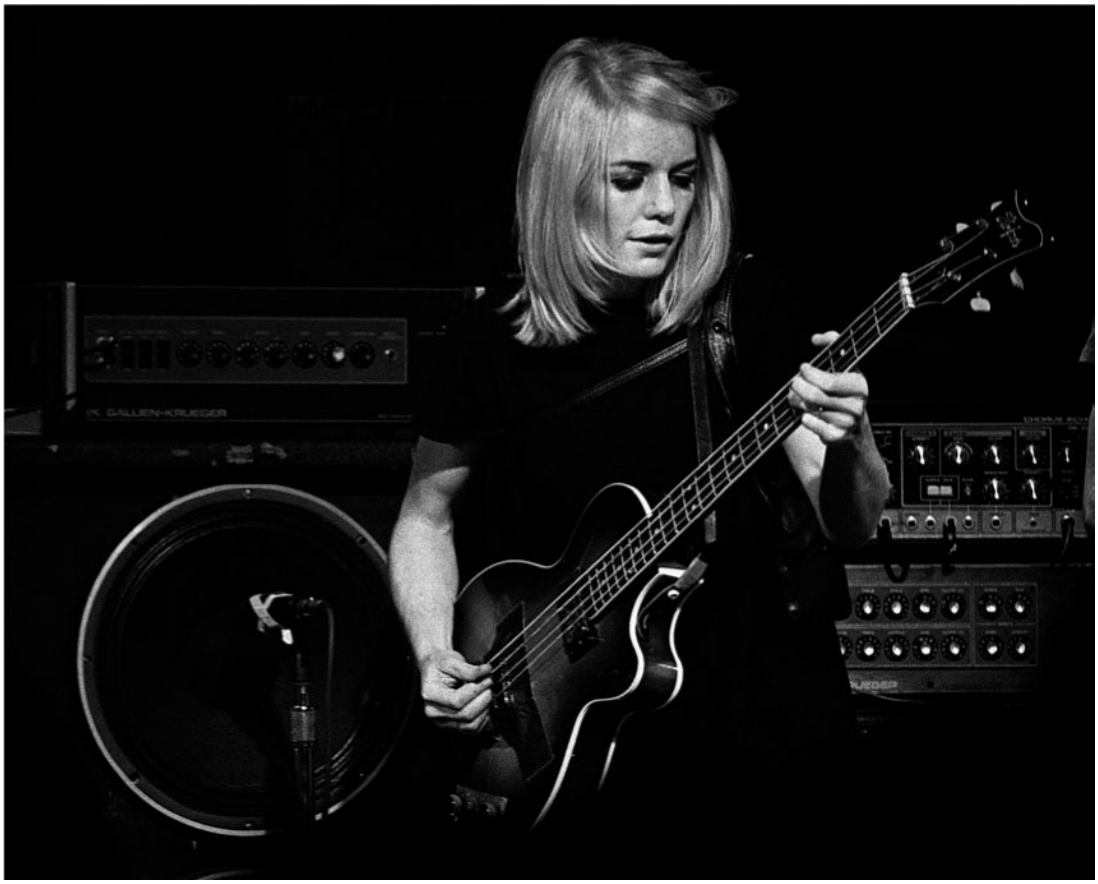
Höfner

A quintet of 500/1s *Bottom, left to right:* ’60, ’58; *top, left to right:* late ’61, early ’62, ’63

“Höfners have always been a dream to play, with a lightweight hollow body and a slim short scale neck, but the tone is clear and as fat as you might wish.”

—TINA WEYMOUTH

My appreciation of Höfner was much like any other musician growing up in the Beatles age: Paul McCartney played a left-handed “Violin” Bass that looked supercool and had a tone that bounced and grooved along melodically with the most famous pop songs ever written. But my own musical direction was progressive hard rock and prog, which precluded me from even considering using an instrument that I so strongly associated with pop. As much as I loved a whole slew of Beatles songs, and still admire Macca’s bass parts and playing to this day, it never struck me as “my thing,” so I never chased one down to play or even try out. (In fact, I’d never played *any* Höfner bass before.)



Tina Weymouth on her Höfner Club bass with Talking Heads at the Agora Ballroom, Atlanta, GA, 1980 *(Rick Diamond/Getty Images)*

On the other hand, once I had made the decision to collect iconic basses, how could I not seriously consider one of the most iconic of all time? My first Höfner 500/1 "Violin" Bass was an early 1958 model. The woodwork was gorgeous and the tone was deep and true (although I found the neck big, round, and a little lumpy). It made me *curious*, and as I've said, that's a dangerous word for me. . . .

During the rehearsals for the R40 Tour in Los Angeles, I paid a visit to a vintage guitar guy I'd had some dealings with before. He'd just acquired a flock of Höfners, from which I selected a lovely Blonde 500/3—a one-pickup archtop. But the most interesting moment of that visit was when he pulled out a red '61 set-neck solid bass—a very e*arly* one, and pretty darned rare. I plugged it in with few expectations, and was stunned by its huge bottom-end tone—loud and deep and gorgeous. I was sold. I immediately took it to rehearsal, and lo and behold, even in the context of the band it thundered—

remarkable for a bass that was so light and toylike in feel. And it fit in perfectly with one of the closing songs of our show, “What You’re Doing.”

Inevitably, I began to seek out other Höfner solid basses and, as you will see, was fortunate enough to find quite a few from the early- and mid-1960s, each one a little different from the last. And this obsession spread to their big and beautiful hollow-bodies, with their own connection to the Fab Four.

It could be said that if it weren’t for the Beatles, Höfners would have languished in obscurity, but the more time I’ve spent playing them, the more my respect for their beautiful craftsmanship (especially in the early years) has grown. Right through the range, their basses are at times visually stunning yet always truly underrated, from the 500/1s to the archtop 500/5s, to the solid 182s and 185s. I hope you dig these as much as I have loved gathering them together.

DIGGING FOR HÖFNERS

Meet Clem C. Cachot-Coulom, bass player, Höfner freak, and proprietor of Guncotton Guitars in London, England. He’s been really helpful walking us through the world of minute changes to Höfner basses in the early 1960s.

I got into 1950s rock ’n’ roll in 1980s Paris, so I was either really cool or really un*cool. I started playing at thirteen and only ever wanted a* vintage *guitar. Seeing that Paul McCartney was left-handed like me, I first got a ’72 Höfner 500/1 bass, right-handed, which I flipped over. But as soon as I got that bass, I realized it didn’t have the right pickups. It didn’t have the right knobs. It didn’t have the right tuners. It didn’t have* nothing *like Paul McCartney’s—the same shape, but nothing else. It took another three years before I found a ’64 model, because there were none about—especially in Paris. I was in love with it,* but. . . . *It had binding on the neck, so I wasn’t happy with that. It became a never-ending chase. The bass to have is the ’61, which Paul played for only two years. You can find plenty of others, but not that one. But you dig and you dig.*

Clem C. Cachot-Coulom, Guncotton Guitars

Höfner
HOLZER

Höfner

“Violin” Bass

1956 & 1958

Höfner 500/1

SUNBURST

Although the first “Violin” Bass I purchased was a ’58 (shown above), I was super-thrilled to find this very cool first-year 500/1 right before the book went to press; thrilled because, among other things, it has Höfner’s earliest headstock inlay design. Only about thirty of these basses were made that year (although Höfner production numbers in this period are notoriously difficult to confirm).

It’s had two owners before me, and looks and feels like it was well-used but well-loved, as it still plays great—in spite of its three-piece neck, which is as big as a baseball bat. Both instruments are beautifully crafted: carved spruce top, flat back, lovely black binding around that iconic violin-like body—with one exception, at least to my eye: the circular control panel looks like it landed from outer space. It’s got a 1950s sci-fi vibe, a funny sort of anachronism.

Höfner

TREBLE TONE
BASS TONE
TREBLE VOLUME

These are Höfner’s single-coil “bar” pickups. In 1956 they were housed in hollowed-out rosewood with a plastic top, but entirely in plastic by 1958.

It wasn’t until we shot this ’56 that I noticed its back is made from a single panel—as opposed to the later models, which would have two book-matched pieces.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HÖFNER “VIOLIN” BASS

The Höfner company, a family enterprise founded in 1887 by the master luthier Karl Höfner, was by the middle of the twentieth century Germany’s largest manufacturer of stringed and fretted instruments, but it wasn’t until the 1950s that it went electric. In 1952, Karl’s son, Walter, hand-wound their first electric pickup, and brought out Höfner’s first electric archtops in 1953; the short scale, hollow-body electric 500/1 bass, with its violin-like shape, was introduced in 1956.

Clem believes that the 500/1 was probably “influenced” by Gibson’s own violin-shaped bass, the EB. “Höfner has always denied that the 500/1 was their version,” he says, “but I truly do believe they were at least inspired by it. There are a lot of similarities between the two instruments, especially their shape and their 30" scale. It seems likely to me that the Kalamazoo-made bass was at the back of Walter Höfner’s mind when he designed the 500/1. He must have seen it at a trade show or in some magazine.”

1960

Höfner 500/1

SUNBURST

Of all the early Höfners, this is my favorite. It’s got those great-sounding closely spaced single-coil “Toaster” pickups near the neck for maximum low end, which started to appear on Höfner basses in 1960. The slimmer neck—made possible by the introduction of a truss rod—feels lovely to play.

Top left: Rather than using their two-a-side strip tuners, Höfner fit this beauty with individual Van Gent “rugby balls.” ***Left:*** These narrow tortoiseshell control panels started to appear in 1957, as the circular ones were being phased out.

1961

Höfner 500/1 “Cavern”

SUNBURST

(Refin)

Did I mention these are *really* hard to find? I was ecstatic when we finally tracked one down in Germany. This true “Cavern” has all its original parts in place, and its neck and back are in great condition, but it did have some odd overspray on a section of the top, which required some TLC to restore the finish to its former glory. However, and more important, it plays and sounds every bit as good as I’d hoped it would—with that great double-diamond bouncy bottom end—and the neck plays easy and fast, as good as the ’60, which was my favorite 500/1 before this baby showed up.

In 1961, the Diamond logo twin-coil pickups (Höfner's version of a humbucker) were introduced, pearloid replaced tortoiseshell on the pickguard and control panel, and the top changed from carved spruce to pressed, laminated plywood.

The Beatles with Pete Best. Paul holds his 1961 Höfner 500/1 *(M. and C. Hayward/Getty Images)*

WHAT EXACTLY IS A "CAVERN" BASS?

In early 1961 a young, unknown musician named Paul McCartney bought a left-handed Höfner bass, called simply a 500/1, from a Steinway shop in Hamburg, Germany. It was hardly the most sought-after electric bass in the world, but it was affordable and had one unique quality.

"I couldn't afford a Fender," Paul has said in Andy Babiuk's book *Beatles Gear*. "I found this Höfner violin bass, and to me it seemed like, because I was left-handed, it looked less daft because it was symmetrical. So I got into that. That became my main bass."

Pete Best, who was with Paul at the time, further explained, "He didn't just buy it off the peg. He got it custom made."

These days, a 500/1 exactly like Paul's first is among the rarest collectibles you could hope to find. Very few of them were made, because during that period Höfner's specs were changing at such a rapid pace that after a few short months this version no longer existed. Beatles lovers have nicknamed it the "Cavern" because, of course, the Cavern was the Liverpool club where the Beatles cut their teeth. Much easier to find are other versions of the 500/1 similar to Paul's, but not the same—as of 1963, riding the wave of Beatlemania, Höfner's UK importer, Selmer, started selling 500/1s that it

called the “Violin Bass” (and fans call the “Beatle Bass”)—but if you’re going for the holy grail, below are the necessary specs. Caveat emptor! Fakes abound.

SPECS FOR THE CAVERN

- Made between February and May 1961
- One-piece flat maple back, hand-carved two-piece spruce top
- 30" scale; twenty-two frets
- Two Höfner Diamond logo pickups, close together near the neck
- Three-piece neck with truss rod and no binding
- Vertical block-letter logo, with spade motif partly obscured by truss rod cover
- Individual Van Gent rugby ball tuners
- White/ivory pearloid pickguard and control panel

HOFNER

Early 1962

Höfner 500/1

SUNBURST

Later 1962

Höfner 500/1

SUNBURST

Note the two-piece neck construction, which started appearing in 1962. The bass that Höfner gave Paul McCartney as a gift in ’63 (which he still uses today) also features a two-piece.

1963

Höfner 500/1

SUNBURST

Here’s what makes collecting Höfners so fascinating, but tricky. This early ’62 500/1 shares most but not *all* of the exact features of my ’61 Cavern, the main differences being: the back of the ’62 is curved not flat, and its headstock features a horizontal script logo (which started appearing in late ’61). Those are two examples of the kind of minute changes you find again and again as you struggle to trace the evolution of any Höfner bass model from the mid-’50s to the mid-’60s.

This bass has the horizontal script logo, which started appearing on Höfner headstocks in late ’61—and is one of the tells that it’s not a true Cavern.

Left to right: Early ’62, late ’62, and ’63

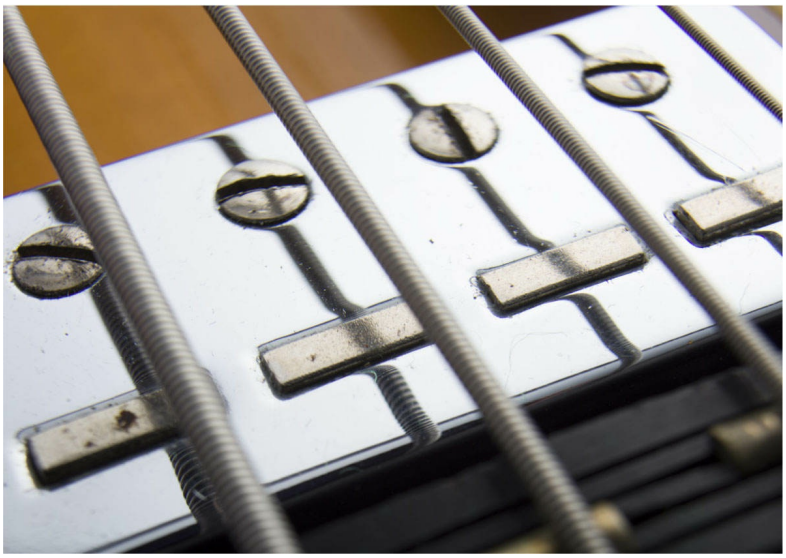
Location! Location! Location! As you can see on the later ’62, these Diamond pickups now have adjustable pole pieces, and one of them has moved down next to the bridge. The obvious result, to my ear, is an increase in top end and definition, which must have been a boon to recording engineers around the world, but at the sacrifice of some bottom. It may be out of character for me to say this, being a twangophile, but I kind of love the outrageous amount of bottom end you get from the two being closer together near the neck.

STICK YOUR NECK OUT!

When it comes to Höfner neck construction, you find several variations in a short span of time. To begin, the regular production was a three-piece maple-beech-maple sandwich. Before truss rods were introduced in 1960, the neck had to be solid, and the beech in the middle pretty unbreakable, especially when its grain is aligned counter to the maple. In 1962, Höfner started making two-piece necks for its basses, but not exclusively; even after 1962 you can find many instances of three-piece necks. It seems to me that the spike in demand caused by Beatlemania put pressure on Höfner to make a great many in a very short period, and so they used whatever materials they had at hand.

The three-piece neck design that some Höfners still occasionally used, even in 1963, in *addition* to the truss rod

This ’63 is the same as McCartney’s second “Violin” Bass, except for its three-piece neck; Paul’s has a two-piece. In 1963, the most obvious change to the 500/1 model was the introduction of “staple” pickups—still tweaking the top end! The color of this bass is described in Selmer’s catalog as “Brunette Sunburst.”



Left to Right: 1960 Eko 1150; 1953 Gibson EB-1; 1967 Vox Apollo; later 1962 Höfner 500/1

Höfner

Archtop Bass

Höfner began producing beautiful archtop guitars in the 1930s—not a huge leap from the violins and other stringed instruments it had already been producing for more than forty years. It started electrifying them in the 1950s and introduced archtop basses in late 1957. You can clearly see the craftsmanship, from the beautifully carved spruce top to the binding on the F-holes and the ornate inlaid headstock logo design. This model features two

single-coil bar pickups in the closely spaced configuration, with a warm, folksy tone that sounds true to its acoustic nature.

1959

Höfner 500/5

NATURAL

(above, left)

This ’59 features a carefully selected and book-matched maple back, three-piece construction without a truss rod, individual tuners, and a narrow headstock.

1960

Höfner 500/5

NATURAL

(above, right)

Although Höfner was transitioning to Toasters in 1960, this one—like my ’59s—is still fit with bar pickups, and it features the wider headstock and truss rod of the 1960s.

1960

Höfner 500/3

NATURAL

This is the first Höfner archtop I purchased, and the only one that has a single Toaster pickup. They definitely have a punchier sound than the single-coil bars. Just a little better to rock out with.

1959

Höfner 500/5

SUNBURST

Okay, folks, this is the archtop that’s commonly referred to as the “Sutcliffe Bass.” Nowhere else has such a subtle contribution to music been rewarded with such a major honor, but regardless, it’s a truly lovely instrument.

The Silver Beatles in 1960, with Stu Sutcliffe on bass at the far left.
(Michael Ochs Archive)

You gotta love the attention to detail: even the insides of the F-holes are bound—or in classical luthier parlance, “purfled.”

Some people call this hue “Honeyburst” . . . and I like that. It’s cooler and a more apt description than the conventional “Sunburst.”

Left to Right: Höfner 182s; 1962 Red Tolex; 1961 Sunburst; 1961 Sunburst; 1962 White Tolex; 1961 Red; 1961 Red; 1962 White Tolex; 1962 Red

Höfner

Solid Body

“In the coming pages, which feature ten—count ’em, ten—182s and 185s (plus a 188), my over-the-top fascination with their minutiae will be exposed. . . .”

1961

Höfner 182

RED

As I mentioned in my intro, the first of this trio pictured below is the bass I played on “What You’re Doing” on the R40 Tour. In fact, it even made it onto the cover of the live album of that tour. It’s the first version of what Selmer called the “Solid Bass.” The 182 series was introduced in 1960 with Toaster pickups, but I’ve never seen an earlier example than my ’61 in the flesh. I love this bass, but it’s a bit of a contradiction. Although the set-neck slab body is finely constructed, it strikes me as somewhat primitive-looking. Clem Cachot-Coulom says, “It looks to me like a Jazzmaster that’s been dropped on its head.”

This is a true Selmer-distributed “Solid Bass,” as evidenced by the Selmer-stamped serial number. Höfner instruments didn’t leave the factory with a serial number at that time, but several distributors took it upon themselves to add one.

Seen here—for the first time—is a Höfner bass with all the tuners (a.k.a. machine heads, a.k.a. tuning pegs) on one side of the headstock.

VOLUME
VOLUME

Two Diamond pickups in the classic close “Cavern” position

1962

Höfner 182

SUNBURST

The bass pictured below is almost identical to my Red slab-body 182. Both have set-necks, the same body shape, the same everything, except that these pickups have individually adjustable pole pieces. Good to see this road warrior made somebody a living.

VOLUME
SOLO
VOLUME

Interesting that a company that built a reputation on time-consuming, handcrafted details would also use the same mass-produced control panels for every bass, regardless of model.

1961

Höfner 182

RED

In this era for Höfner, there was no linear or consistent development, especially with regard to the pickups and body shapes. This bass is another set-neck in the alternate body shape like the single-pickup 182 here. It was acquired with no electronics, and the Diamond pole pickups were added as an educated guess; from what we've seen on other instruments, they could have easily been Diamonds. This restored '61 still has a set-neck (and an early Selmer serial number), but like our Golden Sunburst of the period, it features Diamonds with adjustable pole pieces. Constant change is here to stay.

1961

Höfner 182

RED

This single-Diamond-pickup, set-neck rarity was made the same year as the slab bodies, but it features Strat-like horns and contours. It’s yet another example of the zigzaggy evolution of Höfner’s instruments.

1962

Höfner 182

RED

By 1962 the set-neck period was over, the zero fret was gone, and the one-piece maple necks were bolted on. The headstocks had become more “Fenderized” in shape, too, and they no longer tilted back. This bolt-on model also features the *earlier* Diamond pickups. . . . Wait, *what?*

1962

Höfner 182

WHITE TOLEX

These basses are identical to the first ’62 contour-body 182, except for their pickup placement and skins, which are made of red or white vinyl with the necks painted black. Höfner had found a striking alternative in Tolex, just as Italian accordion companies used celluloid and other plastics to cover their instruments. It was certainly easier and faster than finishing with lacquer.

1962

Höfner 182

RED TOLEX

1962

Höfner 182

WHITE TOLEX

Hofner
Hofner
Hofner

Skully disassembled this base to show how discolored Tolex can become with age. By comparison with what lies underneath, the so-called White could be “Nightclub Nicotine.”

Industrial simplicity with a bit of an art deco vibe.

Same as the other White model, but—as Höfner did with the 500/1s in 1962—they moved the treble pickup down to the compensated bridge.

1964

Höfner 188 Six-String

GOLD BROKAT

Not being much of a six-string bass player, I seem to have found myself with

a lot of them, and this one is the most visually stunning. It's sort of outrageous, the way it has so many design motifs piled one on top of the other. You have this ornate and intricate black-and-gold brocade Tolex covering, with a flame-red pearloid pickguard and matching headstock, red and white pearloid markers, three Staple pickups, and every manner of dial, button, and switch, and even a rotating thingy. (Sorry, couldn't resist. This is, in fact, the world's coolest pickup selector, ever.) And as if *that* weren't enough, there's a flip-up mute and that snakelike tremolo bar. Geez, Louise, feast your eyes.

Hofner

Introduced in 1963 and made until 1970, the 188 had a 28" scale (two inches shorter than the Fender VI and Gibson EB-6 basses). This version was fit with “Type 175” electrics, the same as in Höfner’s standard guitar model, and came in various vinyl finishes.

1964

Höfner 185

GOLD BROKAT “ARTIST”

Hofner

1965

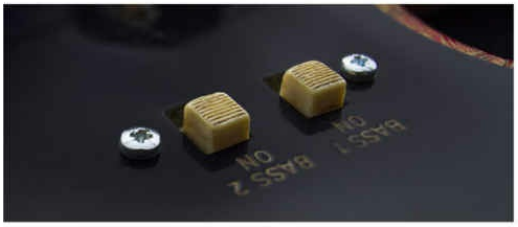
Höfner 185

RED BROKAT “ARTIST”

In late 1962/early 1963, the 182 was being replaced by the 185, which Selmer named the “Artist Solid Bass.” (Its single-pickup companion was dubbed the “Professional.”) Like the 188, the Artist was covered in Brokat vinyl —*Brokat* being German for “brocade”—with a black pickguard that matched the headstock. It had a new, “shaped” tailpiece to match the offset body, and controls were now mounted directly to the pickguard, particular to each model.

Hofner

Hofner


NO
BASS 2
NO
BASS 1

Hofner

1960

Höfner Fledermaus

BRUNETTE SUNBURST GUITAR

HOFNER
Höfner

OK, I know it isn't a bass, but holy moly, look at this weird and wacky creation, one of Höfner's rarest instruments ever: the Fledermaus or Bat Guitar. I simply couldn't help including it here for curiosity's sake. It's all-original and fine-tuned with period correct parts to full working order by our friend and Höfner maven, Clem, according to whom only four (of the rumored eight to eleven produced) are known to still exist. Furthermore, the body is numbered in two places on the inside as "#1." Pretty special! And what's with the shape? Well, as those who speak German (and opera fans) will already know, *Die Fledermaus* means "the bat." It emits more than just a squeak, however, thanks to its built-in four-watt solid-state amplifier and elliptical four-inch speaker.

Walter Höfner designed the Fledermaus as a showpiece for the 1960 Musik Messe trade show in Frankfurt. (These photos are from the Milan fair of that year.) You can see (below) two of them on the bandstand behind the drum kit. (Note the one on the right looks like it doesn't have any amp controls.)

1961

Höfner 191 Doubleneck

SUNBURST

Wow, there’s so much going on here in such a small and weightless package. This early 191 from Höfner features set-necks with pearloid binding, a Diamond bass pickup, and two Diamonds with poles for the guitar side. It has early bar bridges but completely different tailpieces. If I’d only had one of these in the late 1970s, my spinal column would be *much* happier.

A whole lotta love went into this instrument, a whole lotta pearloid, and a little bit of leather.

This instrument has aged gracefully. The hue and finish of the wood, the patina on the hardware, and the pearloid control panels barely betray its age.

Hofner

5

Ampeg

Ampeg

Before I began collecting, I mainly associated Ampeg with its awesome-sounding bass amps, which I used on and off over the years. When I thought of their guitars and basses, what immediately came to mind was the iconic Dan Armstrong Plexiglas "See-Through." I suppose because they look so very rock 'n' roll, guitarists in particular found them irresistible: Keith Richards, Ronnie Wood, Dave Grohl . . . the list goes on. While the basses were not seen quite so often, they nevertheless had their allure. Some great players took a break from their Number Ones to take them out for a test

drive. They sure looked effin' cool in the hands of Jack Bruce (playing a fretless), Geezer Butler, Bill Wyman, and the fabulous Phil Lynott; those guys couldn't resist checking them out, even though they all eventually returned to their signature basses or simply moved on.

As for the Ampeg "Scroll Bass"—or as Ampeg officially named it, the "Horizontal Bass"—it's rare to see anybody playing one. While in Bad Company, Boz Burrell played a fretless second-generation AMUB-1, as did fellow Canadian bassist Rick Danko of the Band. The Scrolls always struck me as anachronistic-looking beasts . . . and let's face it, they are!

I also recall seeing those long-horned "Devil Basses" and thinking, "What the *what*? How weird!" But during the writing of this book, I couldn't think of a single musician who played one—until somebody sent me a clip of Jerry Lee Lewis on the *Johnny Cash Show* where, lo and behold, his bass player is standing in the shadows with what looks like a blue Devil Bass. If *that's* not weird, I dunno what is.

From this player's perspective, they're somewhat unwieldy, and for my music, their tone can be a challenge, but as a collector and appreciator of the unusual, I love their eccentricity and find them hard to resist.

Ampeq

Workin’ them out: Jack Bruce in 1977 *(middle)*, Geezer Butler in 1972 *(bottom left)* and Phil Lynott testing one out in 1973 *(bottom right)*

A POTTED HISTORY OF AMPEG

Ampeg’s founder, Everett Hull, insisted to the bitter end that fretted basses with metal strings were just a passing fad. Rock ’n’ roll’s amplified distortion offended him; he even wrote an article in a trade magazine decrying what he called “rock and ruin.” His ambition was to create an electric bass for upright jazz players, but his stalwart resistance to the march of time undermined his efforts even then.

In 1962, the company’s first electric bass, the Baby Bass, featured a “Mystery Pickup,” a design built on a diaphragm embedded in the body of the instrument that produced what even *Ampeg: The Story Behind the Sound* (a book endorsed on Ampeg’s own website) describes as ranging from “thumping, dark, and boomy” to “abrasively nasal.” More with-it employees begged Hull to go with a more conventional design, but he ignored them, bent on making a device that would work with nonmagnetic gut strings.

Even though the Baby Bass wasn’t a commercial success, its pickup was installed on the AEBs and AUBs. The afore-mentioned Burrell and Danko played the second-generation AMUBs, which had Ampeg’s magnetic pickup, but still switched *them* out for P-Bass pickups, which was almost cruelly ironic when you consider that for Hull, Fender was, according to an ex-Ampeg employee, “the other f-word.”

1966

Ampeg AEB-1

TEAL

The AEB, or “Ampeg Electric Bass,” and its unfretted counterpart, the AUB, first appeared in 1966 and was produced for about two years. It was meant to appeal to upright players looking to join the electric age.

Among my Scroll Basses, this one differs in its construction, as it’s made of solid wood. Typically, the backs of both the AEB-1 and AUB-1 are made from a sheet of ¼" plywood, and the fronts of the body are three pieces of maple glued onto the plywood. There’s a center block that’s routed to accommodate the pickup, and two F-holes cut into the bouts. The F-holes were partly acoustic and partly decorative, but also, according to its patent application, a very handy handle. I never knew that was intentional, but I’ve always instinctively carried it around that way.

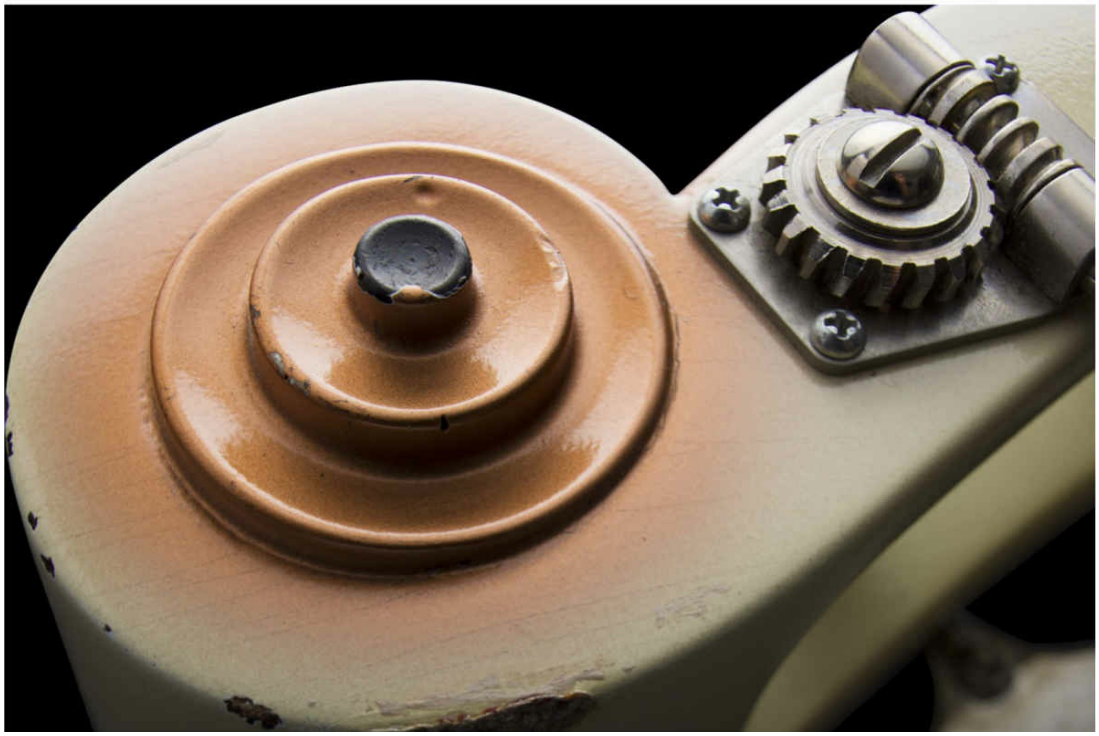
A COLLECTOR'S TALE

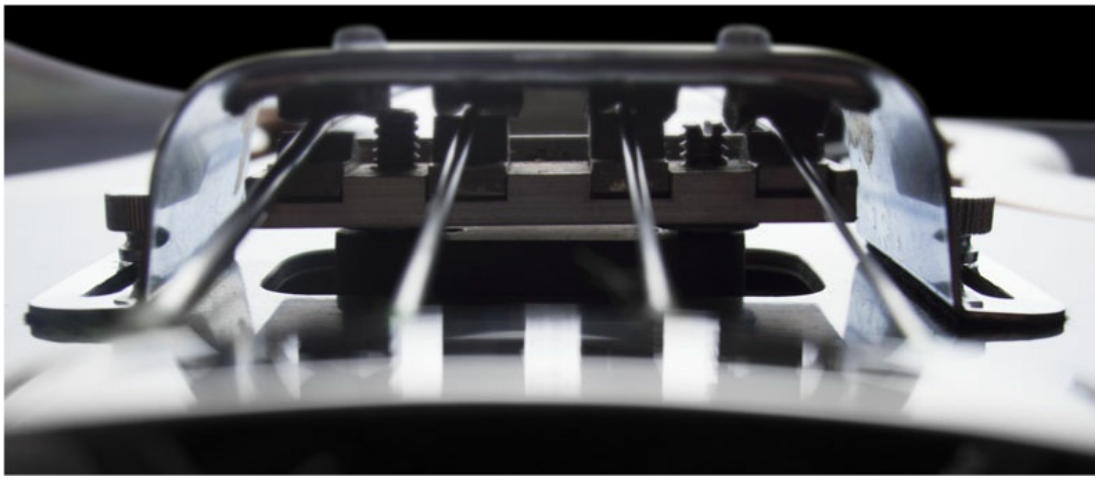
As one of only three known basses in Teal, this Ampeg AEB-1 is a rarity. I was first offered this particular instrument on the Clockwork Angels Tour in 2012, when a friendly local dealer from Chicago brought it to a show. During sound check I played it and liked it, but I wasn't yet in the full throes of collector madness and didn't bite. Fast-forward a year or two later and, after picking up a couple of other Scroll Basses and doing my research, I came to realize how rare that Teal one was, and began to regret letting it slip away. We contacted the dealer and learned that he'd already sold it to Jeff Tweedy of Wilco. He contacted Jeff to see if he was interested in selling it to me, which he generously and most graciously did.

1966

Ampeg AEB-1
WHITE COPPER

Collectors are always on the lookout for genuine, unique colors. I’m no different, and I was really happy to find this one, because I’ve never seen the White Copper combo on any other bass. I’m told by Bruce Johnson, keeper of the Ampeg flame, that only a few of them were made, and usually as presentation gifts to Ampeg employees.





THE HISTORY OF THE MYSTERY

I’ve found this pickup to be extremely microphonic, which is not so friendly in a big, loud rock band. In an effort to understand why, I went to Bruce Johnson of Johnson’s Extremely Strange Musical Instrument Company, which produces new, improved versions of Ampeg basses out of his one-man shop in Fillmore, California. “The ‘Mystery’ pickup is buried in the body underneath the bridge,” he says. “I call it a mechanical percussive pickup. It’s actually two magnetic coils with a steel diaphragm over top of it. The bridge sits on top of the diaphragm, making it move within the magnetic field of the two coils. Ampeg wanted to get that percussive pulse at the beginning of the note, followed by that little bit of reverb before you settle into the main note itself. That was their goal. They almost got there, but not quite.”

1967

Ampeg AEB-1
REDBURST

Here’s a sweet story about the two basses here, the AEB-1 and its fretless

sibling below: I found an ad on eBay for the AEB-1, which Skully followed up on. The seller was a luthier who lived in upstate New York. He'd apprenticed to his father, also a luthier, who'd started a company named Kolstein & Son; Samuel Kolstein had founded a shop in Brooklyn in 1943, making violins and bows. Over a span of sixty years he'd established a proud reputation for making quality instruments, including violas, cellos, and upright basses, and trained his son Barrie to carry on that tradition. Barrie played in bands, and rather than use an upright all the time, he played Scroll basses, fretted and fretless. He was a big fan of Ampegs, due to their symbiotic relationship with traditional instruments. When I found out about him I went to his website, and posted there was a very touching page dedicated to his dad; clearly, he was a huge influence, and the story moved me. When talking to Barrie about acquiring this instrument, he told me he'd ideally like to see the fretted and the fretless find the same home, so I agreed to buy both. I'm a sucker for father-and-son stories.

Airline

1968

Ampeg AUB-1

REDBURST FRETLESS

These early Ampeg pickguards are made from a rare and valuable material that’s no longer produced: five-layer Bakelite engraver’s stock once used for making signs in factories. It’s irreplaceable.

On these early models, the serial number can be found on the backside of the tailpiece.

1202

“These Scrolls are eccentric and anachronistic, but have a beauty all their own.”

Although these fine headstocks appear to be made entirely of wood, the concentric finials were, in fact, made of molded plastic, eventually replaced by cast epoxy. This doesn’t detract from the fact that a lot of handcrafting was involved, too.

1967 & 1968

Ampeg ASB-1 Devil Basses
REDBURST

The Devil Bass is one of the wildest instruments I’ve ever laid hands on. It has the same Mystery Pickup and a 34" scale as the Scroll basses. With its extreme long-horned body and dual cutaway, it gives access to the highest notes on the fretboard. Fewer than one hundred were made between 1966 and early 1968—only a couple at a time—and for all this we have to thank Mike Roman, woodshop worker and former coffin maker. Hey, Mike, does the *S* in “ASB” stand for “Satan”?

1970

Ampeg Dan Armstrong

SEE-THROUGH

Made of clear Plexiglas cut and sanded like wood, these see-through instruments have a modernist appeal. All twenty-four frets on the rosewood board/maple neck are completely clear of the body, and, this being a later instrument, it features a cool matte black pickguard. Funnily enough, Armstrong's early manual recommends gentle buffing with toothpaste and a soft cloth!

1969

Ampeg Dan Armstrong

BLACK

This ’68 prototype is one of only eight black basses that Dan Armstrong made from a type of plastic called cellulose butyrate. It has all the typical appointments of the early See-Throughs. Armstrong abandoned the idea because he found the material impractical to work with, and he was unhappy with the instrument’s tonality. Sonically, I found it has a tamer, more conventional tone than its invisible brother.

DAN ARMSTRONG AND AMPEG

Dan Armstrong ran a guitar shop in New York's Greenwich Village when, in 1969, Ampeg approached him for advice on improving its Grammer acoustic guitars, and he recommended it produce an electric guitar instead, to complement its line of amps. In June of that year, at the NAMM show in Chicago, he debuted the world's first commercially available clear instruments—a guitar and bass that shared the same body shape. (Fender had already designed an entirely Lucite Strat in the late 1950s, but never brought it to market.) It was initially advertised as just the "Dan Armstrong," but musicians so often referred to it as the "See-Through" that Ampeg trademarked that more descriptive name.

Despite its success, it was made for only two years. According to *Ampeg: The Story Behind the Sound*, Armstrong himself was a perfectionist who insisted on okaying every instrument before it left the factory, but he only visited occasionally,

slowing down production and compounding Ampeg's financial woes. He quit in 1971 and moved to London, where he formed a company with his son, Kent, and Tony Pitt, a musician and draftsman, with whom he developed a new line of guitars and basses known as the Dan Armstrong London instruments.

DAN ARMSTRONG · AMPEG

DAN ARMSTRONG · AMPEG

“These surprisingly heavy bastards are so effin’ rock ’n’ roll.”

Dan Armstrongs weigh a ton and are probably the loudest bass guitars ever. Due to their pickup design, they have a surprisingly wide tonal range, too. It’s really like two pickups stacked one above the other—treble coil on top of a larger, more powerful bass coil—that you dial between. This particular bass, being a later model, has had a two-way toggle switch added. By switching between the different caps, I can play either with maximum bottom end or cut to a cleaner, less-driven sound. What it lacks in finesse, it makes up for in power. Definitely all rock ’n’ roll and not for the faint of heart.

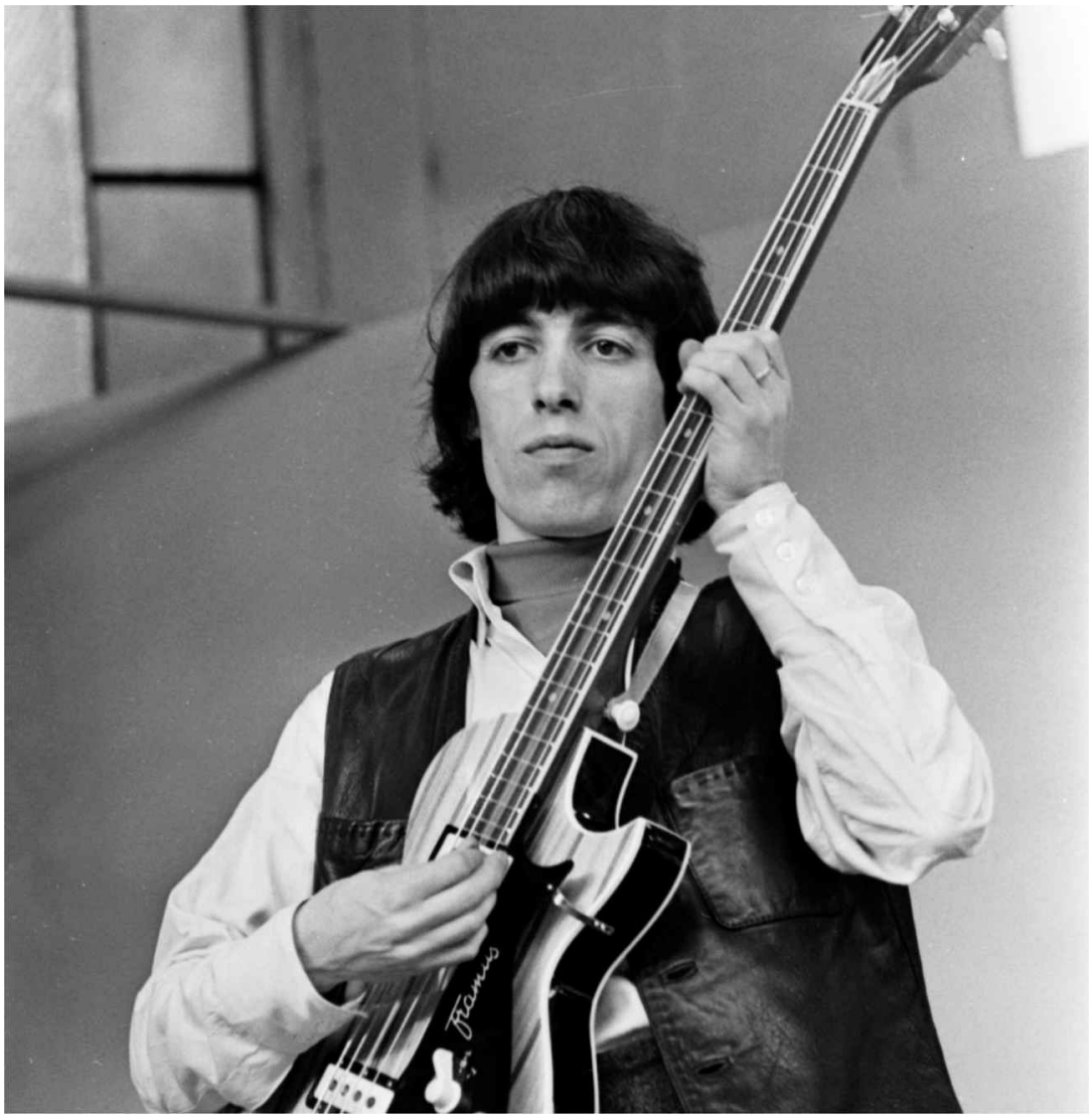
Dan Armstrong shared a shop in New York City with pickup and guitar designer Bill Lawrence. They collaborated on a pickup, which, unlike its six-string siblings, isn’t replaceable.

Interview with

Bill Wyman

Famed Rolling Stones bassist, founder of Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, author, archivist, archaeological detectorist, photographer, restaurateur, and the only rock musician to ever take a hat trick at the Oval (that's cricket)

THE KINGS ROAD, LONDON, SEPTEMBER 11, 2017



Bill playing his Framus 5150 Star Bass Deluxe with the Humbug finish, at the Sydney Showground in 1965 *(Sydney Morning Herald)*

GEDDY LEE: When did you know you wanted to play bass?

BILL WYMAN: Well, before I wanted to play bass, I wanted to be a *musician*. I was ten when my aunt would take me to the dances south of the river, Cab Calloway and all that. I'd watch her do the jitterbug with an American soldier to the big dance bands, and I knew I wanted to play. We were really poor when I grew up, there was lots of hardship, so going into the military and the air force in Germany was a special time, because in 1955 that's where I heard the beginnings of rock 'n' roll on the US Armed Forces Radio Service. When I got out, the band I formed in

England, the Cliftons, did mainly skiffle at first—you know, the Lonnie Donegan influence—but then moved into Chuck Berry, Willie Dixon, whom I idolized, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, all of them.

GL: And the legend is that in 1961 you made your own fretless bass, the first-ever electric fretless. . . .

BW: I didn't have a proper bass, I was playing a Burns, an electric six-string that I tuned down and once I even put bass strings on it. Then one night I saw a local band down in Buckinghamshire called the Barron Knights, and I was bowled over. The bass player, Barron Anthony, had this amazing fat bass sound that I knew straightaway was missing with the Cliftons. First I made my own amp, a thirty-watt cabinet with a concrete base from instructions I got in *Radio Rentals* magazine. Then I had this cheap bass, a Dallas Tuxedo it was called. I think it cost eight quid, but the strings buzzed all over it, so I took off the frets and filled in the slots with wood putty. I didn't like the shape much either, so I drew a shape on the back of it like I'd seen Gibsons and Fenders have in pictures, and asked a neighbor to saw it down. He said, "You can't do that, it's a guitar!" But I made him do it, and beveled the edges, and sanded off the paint and put in a Baldwin pickup, and that was that, the first fretless electric bass, years before they were manufactured commercially.

GL: And it sounded good?

BW: I used it on every Stones album up to 1975, so . . . yeah. It sounded wonderful.

GL: But you played all sorts of other basses, too.

BW: Yeah, but there were a lot over a lot of years. Thirty years.

GL: Was it easy to find the ones you wanted?

BW: It was easy to find the basses. It was hard to find the money.

GL: So, when you started with the Stones you played your homemade bass?

BW: Yeah, and I played it with a Vox AC30, and a little Watkins Westminster amp, which had tremolo and echo and everything. So in all the books it always says I brought electricity to the Stones.

GL: You improved their sound instantly! Did you used to use a pick back then?

BW: Yeah, yeah. I always used a plectrum, all the way through, right from the beginning. I never played with my fingers.

GL: How did you decide on a Framus? Did you just check out a ton of basses?

BW: Nah, I didn't do things like that. The cheapest one. I liked the look of it, and it wasn't expensive. It was something like seventy pounds at the time. I bought it on weekly payments.

GL: Sure. When I first started I had a different kind of payment schedule, 'cause I would beg my mom to loan me the money, and she would make me work it off in her variety store.

BW: Well, you were richer than me then, if your mum had some sort of fuckin' *company*. I remember once my mum sent me up to the bomb site up at the top of the road, where bombs had landed previously and destroyed houses, which had started to grow vegetation, and asked me to pick dandelion leaves. We washed them and put 'em between slices of breads. It was good for you, it had iron, but fuckin' hell did it taste horrible.

GL: What was the bass sound you were after in those days?

BW: I was in pursuit of the sound I was already getting with my own homemade bass, which I couldn't take on the road. I had to find another guitar to try and emulate that sound, which was a bit like a double bass. 'Cause the Stones played lots of stuff from Solomon Burke, Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, and all that, so it did need a fat bass sound under there, not a *doinky-doink-doink*, which most of the bands in England were doing at the time. It was all that clangy, noisy, metallic bass sounds. There was hardly anybody playing bass like I was, you know. I'm not bragging, but they weren't.

So I bought a big one, the Framus Star Bass, on which I insisted on having flatwound strings, which were really, really supple. You could really pull them and still get a nice bottom end on it and all that. But then I went on to the little body one. I got them all hanging up in my restaurant, Sticky Fingers. You going to have a glass of wine? Red? White? Rosé?

020 7352 414

GL: I've got the crab, which is probably better with the white, so—

BW: You've got crabs? Move over, mate!

GL: Were you a fan of Motown records? Did you like James Jamerson and players like that?

BW: Keith was crazy about him. That's why he was always telling me to get a Fender Jazz. But yeah, I liked the stuff he did, of course I did.

GL: And you played a Mustang Competition for a while?

BW: Yeah, 'cause Keith kept saying, "Play a Fender Jazz!" But I fuckin' can't. They're too big for me. I can't reach three frets, you know. It's impossible. So they did that smaller version, the Mustang. I had that orange one, which I've loaned out to exhibitions. I used that from '69 to '70, America and Europe, and then I just got fed up with it. It was still too big and cumbersome, so I switched back to a small Framus, I think.

GL: I saw pictures of you playing a Dan Armstrong for a while—on the Exile on Main Street Tour.

BW: Yeah, they had the plastic see-through one. But they made a little one for me, a little brown one with the slide-in pickup, which was nice. I just switched all the time because I could not find basses that really suited me, and when I went to Australia in '73, I tried a Gibson . . . EB-3, is it? Is that the . . . ?

GL: The EB-3, with two pickups.

BW: Yeah, I played that for one tour, but I didn't like it; it was a bit sort of muffly sounding. Then I had Travis Bean make me three basses, personalized short scale, 'specially for me, really little ones. John Entwistle was always trying to give me fuckin' Ovations and shit like that. "Play them! Make their ears bleed!" And I said, "Fuckin' hell . . . I'd play 'em, John, but your hands are twice as big as mine." Yours, too—hold 'em up, will you? [*GL holds up hands*] See? Twice as big as mine!

GL: Was John a pal of yours?

BW: Yeah. And Moonie was. They were my two close friends with the Who. I got to know Pete in recent years more, but they used to come round my house and all that.

GL: So you wouldn't consider yourself a collector of basses?

BW: Nah! But John was. He had Fender Jazz basses from every year, from the first year they were built he bought them.

GL: I've noticed at one point you were into Vox instruments?

BW: Oh, that horrible fuckin' Teardrop? Ugh, I fuckin' hated it.

GL: [*Laughs*] Oh, really?

BW: They made a guitar for Brian, too, and Brian liked his, but I hated my bass. I had to play it, though, 'cause it was commissioned. But really I just switched all the time because I could not find basses that suited me. I had to have short scale, really small, so I could play them. That's why I held them upright.

The Bill Wyman Special—his original customized fretless

Framus
Framus
Star-Bass

One of Bill's retired Framus basses

GL: Ah, right. I was going to ask you the reason for the way you held up your bass.

BW: 'Cause I didn't have the length in my arm, I found them much easier to hold them up *here* [*holds imaginary bass upright*] and play up and down. Also, it did help me avoid the spotlight and look at the girls in the front row [*smiles*]. So I used to hold my hands up like that and cover my eyes and I'd see a pretty girl and I'd say, "Thirty-two," you know, sort of mouth them my room number.

GL: [*Laughs*] Very cheeky! . . . So you jived right away with Charlie as a rhythm section?

BW: It fell in really, really quickly, yeah. We really merged very quickly together. And then I started to be a bit braver. I started to do slides, which I could do on a fretless.

Leon Russell used to say to me, "What's the secret of the Stones' rhythm?" 'Cause no one else can really copy it. They never get it quite right. They sound *like* it, but not exactly like it. And I said, "Well, every band follows the drummer, but the Stones don't. Charlie follows Keith. Which is bizarre. And *I* fall in the gap between the two of them, which is also bizarre. So when we used to play, kind of in the rhythm you'd feel a little 'wobble,' a little rockin' thing, which felt like it was gonna fall apart any fuckin' minute."

GL: Yeah, hard to explain "feel". . . .

BW: Yeah, or it would elevate into something really special. And then you'd go into another chord and Keith would make a mistake, the wrong note, and I'd play the wrong note at the same time with him, and Charlie would hit the cymbal at the same time, and we'd all go, "That was great!" It would just be instinctive, and it was amazing.

GL: We call them "happy accidents" . . . when you play with the same guys for a long time, you just know each other inside out. How do you look at your own playing style?

BW: So I play in boxes on the bass. Either down there, right across the strings and back, if I'm doing like a Fats Waller song or something, or I'm halfway up in a box right here, doing a Ray Charles song. I'm limited to five or six frets across, backward and forward. I don't go up

and down.

I never tried to copy anyone, apart from listening a lot to Booker T. and the MGs, which were, to me, perfect. The guy that I first got inspiration from, we're great friends now, was Duck Dunn from Booker T. and the MGs. When I first heard "Green Onions"—actually I don't know if he was even on that, I think he joined later—when I first heard that record, the bass was so simple, it just sat there and you didn't even notice it, and I thought, *That's the way I want to play. I don't want to show off.* Sometimes with the Stones, especially on the country songs, like "Faraway Eyes," I do go all over, doing lines very high sometimes, and "Miss You," stuff like that, doing the walking octaves and stuff. . . . Well, there's a lot them, actually, where I'm busy, but not in a show-off way. I hate players who go all over the fuckin' fretboard. 'Cause I think they should be guitarists, not bass players. You probably are one, so now I'm going to embarrass you. . . .

GL: [*Smiles*] Yeah, well, it could be said that I'm guilty of being busy.

BW: I knew I'd offend you somewhere in the interview!

Bill’s basses at Sticky Fingers, London

The back of Bill’s Travis Bean

6

Around the World in 80 Basses

(More or Less)

As a kid wandering around the music stores in my hometown of Toronto, I could easily spot a Fender or a Gibson, but names like Gretsch and Baldwin were more of a mystery. I remember pressing my nose against the glass, thinking how Mosrites looked so much larger than life, with their strange curvy bodies and angular pickups. (They still look that way to me.) Years later, in my pursuit of vintage basses from the "Big Three"—Fender, Gibson, and Rickenbacker—I discovered a whole nother world of guitar makers, large and small, from inside the US and across the pond, that were competing and innovating in their shadow. I was surprised to learn that in the late 1950s,

while Leo Fender's Jazz Bass was still on the drawing board, Danelectro, Kay, Eko, and Wandrè were also selling basses with designs quite different from the standard Precision model. In fact, when I bought my first Hagstrom De Luxe Sparkle Bass, I was so amazed to find it had been made in 1961 that I felt obliged to beat the bushes and see what else was going on outside of America in those years. Names like Fenton-Weil, Crucianelli, and Meazzi had been foreign to me in every sense, but were now all on my radar.

As I mentioned earlier in this book, I've always seen collecting as a window to history and culture, and basses have been no exception. Look at the Swedes and the Italians in this section, and you can't help but notice the influence of traditional accordion design; check out Zemaitis for the way gun stock engraving was adapted to guitars; just one glance at the Yamahas reveals the legacy of the samurai. I'll admit that not everything is totally indigenous—I mean, what's up with the horns on the UK-made Burns Bison? Last time I checked, bison never roamed Piccadilly Circus—but you get the picture.

Fenton Weill
GUITARS AND AMPLIFIERS
At last Fenton Weill 'pop up' with their complete GUITAR AND AMPLIFIER RANGE
H. WEILL & CO., 237 ACTON LANE, LONDON W.4
SIX-string bass guitar is great!
says Eric Ford
a completely NEW instrument with a wider compass
Wandre guitaren
model Rock Basso
Danelectro
EKO ELECTRIC Basses
ALL-VOX MAN ...that's BILL WYMAN
New Coral Electric Guitars by DANELECTRO
THE VINNIE BELL PROFESSIONAL MODELS
Coral HORNET
Test Play Them Here!
Hagstrom
NEW MODELS FROM
BURNS

1962

Burns Bison

WHITE

(United Kingdom)

Jim Burns, sometimes called “the English Leo Fender,” worked with Ampeg and Henry Weill (later of Fenton-Weill), and in 1960 formed Ormston Burns London Ltd. He made his reputation designing guitars for musicians as diverse as Elvis Presley, George Harrison, Marc Bolan, and John Rostill of the Shadows (as we shall soon see).

1965

Burns “Shadows Bass”

WHITE

(United Kingdom)

Jim Burns was apparently very proud of designing instruments for Cliff Richard and the Shadows, one of the UK’s biggest acts in the early 1960s, due in no small part to guitar god Hank Marvin. This model was introduced in 1964 and designed for bassist John Rostill to match the guitar made for Marvin. It was made in small numbers, and early ones are scarce. It’s a pleasure to play, much lighter than the Bison, and it has a good round, even tone up and down the neck.

SPEAK MEMORY SPEAK
DUST
OF
OBLIVION
BURNS
LONDON

This pristine Bison is a massive amount of wood—big and heavy, and Burns went to a lot of trouble to shape and curve those distinctive horns.

Of the four presets featured here, the “Wild Dog” has to be one of the best names ever for a sound on a guitar. It was described in Burns’s advertising as “a screaming but undistorted super-treble” and “a snarling waspish spine-tingler.” Calm down, boys. While interesting, this dog ain’t so wild. However, the “BASS” setting gives you enough mighty bottom end to shake the room. It’s a good noise.

This bass has some bizarre innovations and trade names that make me think of kitchen appliances from the 1960s. The truss rod is the “Gear-O-Matik,” the pickup the “Rez-O-Matik,” and the adjustable floating bridge the “Rezo-Tube.”

1963

Burns Split Sound Six-String Bass

SUNBURST

(United Kingdom)

Not many of these were made between 1962 and 1964. The six-string Split

Sound is equipped with three “double” pickups, each one having two separate coils that are switched through the rotary dial, giving you four preset sound settings to choose between. Aside from the aforementioned “Wild Dog,” “Treble,” and “Jazz,” you get the unique “Split Sound”: the coil under the three bass strings on the neck pickup is paired with the coil under the three treble strings on the bridge pickup, giving you an extreme combo of bassy bass and trebly treble. Sound complicated? It is!

What? A short scale six-string bass with three pickups, a whammy bar, “Split Sound,” “Wild Dog,” “Treble,” and “Jazz”? I’m gonna lose it!

BURNS
LONDON

BURNS
BURNS

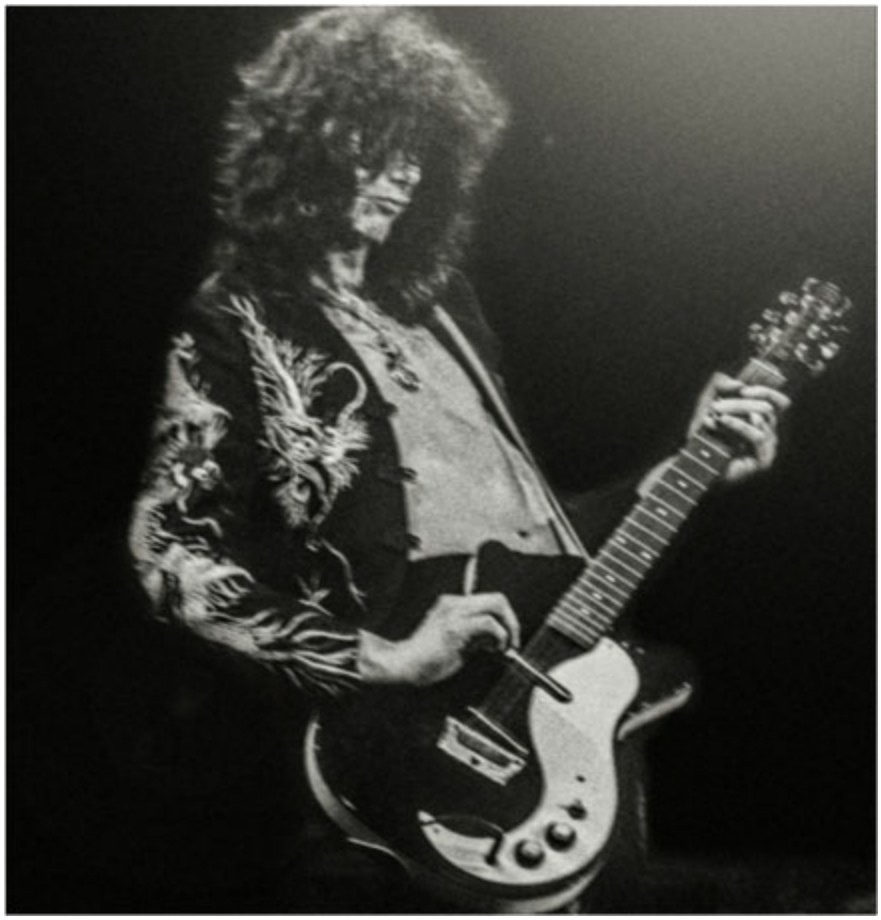
SPLIT SOUND
BASS

Danelectro

Founded in 1947 by Nathan “Nat” Daniel to produce amplifiers, Danelectro was producing not only its own line of solid body guitars and amps by 1954, but also instruments for Montgomery Ward and Sears under its store-brands Silvertone and Airline.

In 1969, when Zeppelin played Toronto, it was the first time I’d seen a Danelectro. Jimmy Page played it, of course, on “White Summer/Black Mountain Side.”

Since then, I’ve come to know the six-strings, the basses, and the doublenecks, with their lightweight bodies and the lipstick-tube pickups, as the inexpensive yet great-sounding instruments they are. When I first picked up a longhorn bass, I was surprised to find how much low end it had, considering that Danos are really known for their twang.



Jimmy Page and his ’61 Dano, circa 1975 *(Dick Barnatt/Redferns)*

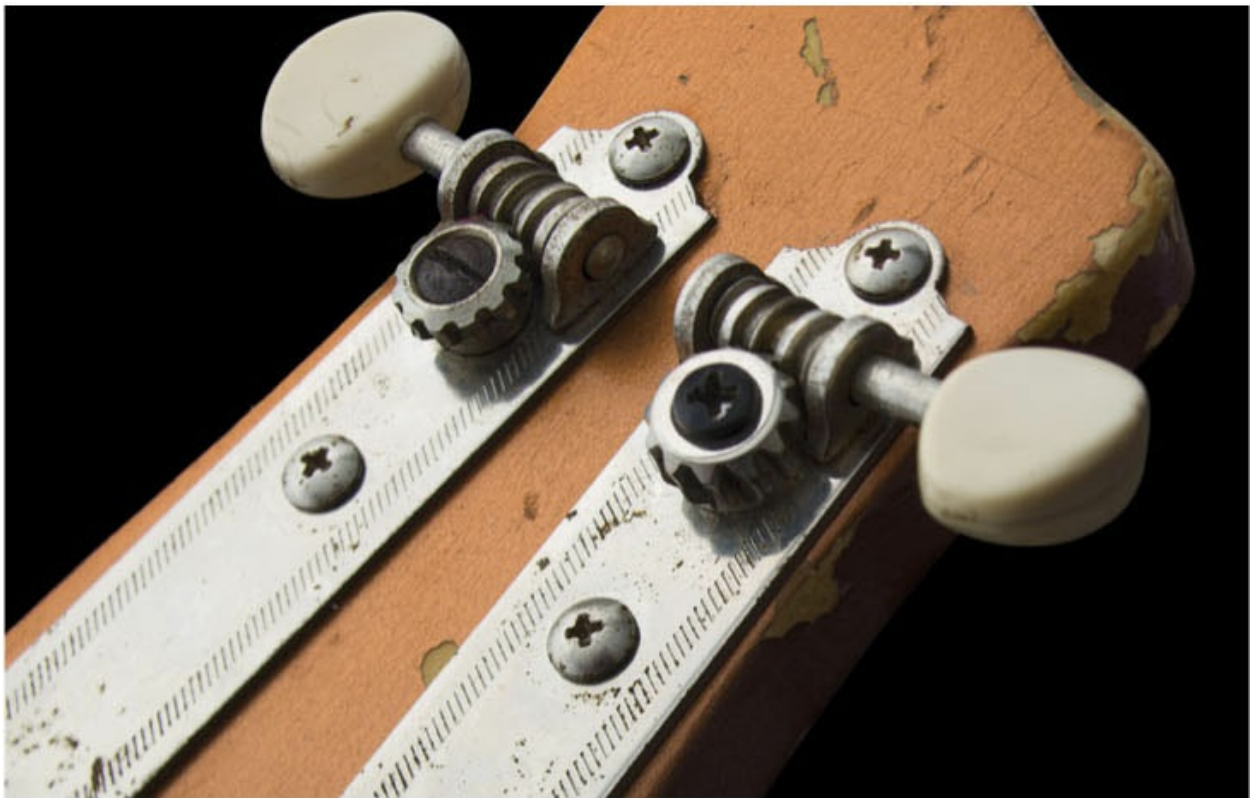
Late 1950s

Danelectro Shorthorn

BRONZE

(United States)

The signature Dano lipstick-tube pickup was the lowest-cost guitar pickup in the industry. Although it was, in fact, a bar pickup housed inside an actual lipstick tube, it wasn’t—according to Nat Daniel’s son Howard—wartime surplus, as is the common misconception, but simply purchased from a metal fabricator who made lipstick tubes and shipped them bulk in raw brass ready for drilling and plating.



GIBSON

The Dano “Coke Bottle” headstock.

This is surely one of the coolest-shaped pickguards from the period. It’s the same shape as the one on Jimmy Page’s 3021.

1960

Danelectro Longhorn

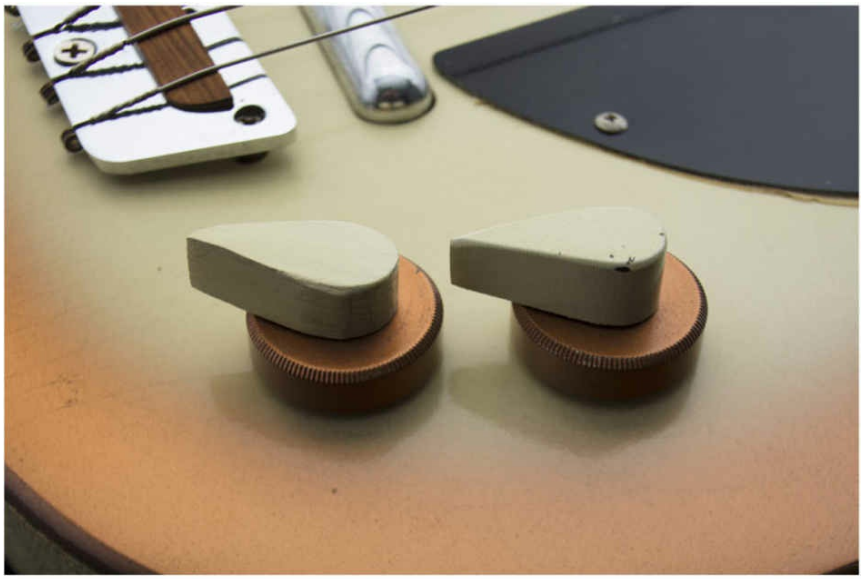
BRONZE AND WHITE SUNBURST

(United States)

Danomania! The Who on Dutch TV, circa 1964 *(Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy)*

This is the iconic Dano Longhorn, one of the first instruments I bought for my collection. It’s so light, and its little wooden knobs make it feel toy-like, but it’s a great-sounding bass.

I love how this bit of wear is shaped exactly like a thumb. Guess the player wasn’t tempted to stray up the neck very often.



1960

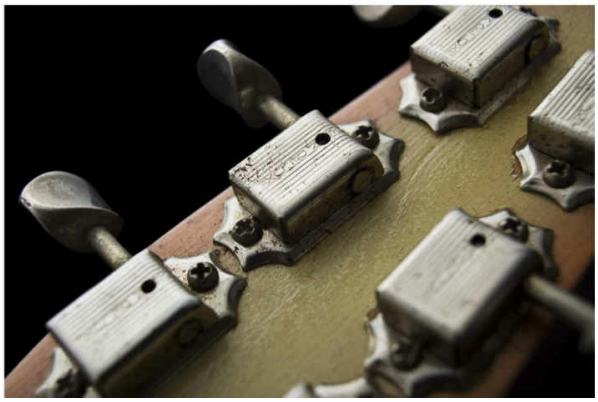
Danelectro Longhorn Six-String Bass

BRONZE AND WHITE SUNBURST

(United States)

The Danelectro six-string bass was the same model heard on Glen Campbell's "Wichita Lineman."

Originally called "White Sunburst," and often "Copperburst" in vintage guitar circles, in the 1968 catalog, the color was "Bronze and White Sunburst."



Late 1960s

Danelectro

Dane Bass E2N4-E WHITE

(United States)

This particular 34" long-scale Dane bass belonged to famed session guitarist and effects king Vincent “Vinnie” Bell, who, along with Nat Daniel, designed guitars and basses for Danelectro, some under the Coral name. He also made some rather esoteric instruments, like the Danelectro Bellzouki and the Coral Electric Sitar. The Dane A, B, C, D, and E instruments came with higher-end appointments as you went up the series. This is one of two basses produced in the Dane line, both of which have much in common with the elegant and slimline Coral Wasp.

Vincent “Vinnie” Bell

1967

Coral W2B4 “Wasp”

RED

(United States)

This is one of my favorites of the Dano-produced basses. I love its sleek, futuristic look, swirly pickguard, and superthin body; and, once again, those great-sounding lipstick pickups come through. Although Daniel sold his company to MCA in 1966, he stayed on board and produced the Coral line the following year. Sadly, MCA closed the plant in 1969. In contrast with Danelectro’s earlier budget-conscious line, these Corals were evidence of an effort to make higher-end instruments. It was even offered with a choice of twenty-five custom colors—this one not dissimilar to Fender’s own Candy Apple Red.

One of the more deluxe features of this bass is the all-rosewood headstock spliced onto a Danelectro Longhorn blank neck.

Coral
WASP
Danelectro

1958

Danelectro 3923 Doubleneck

BRONZE AND WHITE SUNBURST

(United States)

DANELECTRO
DANELECTRO

This guitar/bass combo is without question the lightest doubleneck in my collection. Oh, where were you in the late 1970s? All these early Danos were similarly made: a poplar wood frame, stapled together and covered with Masonite, top and back painted, with the sides covered in vinyl to cover poplar's utilitarian-looking wood grain. Kinda look homemade, don't they?

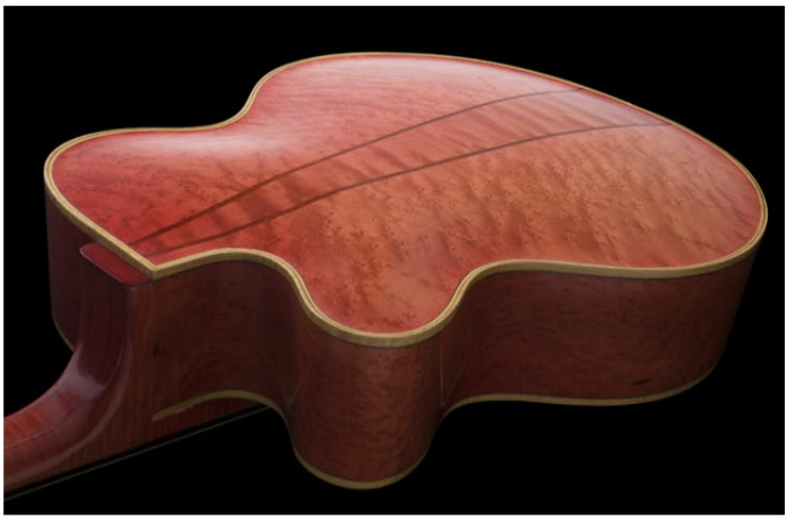
Here's a goofy fact: the Danelectro 6/4 doubleneck was commonly called the "Stan & Dan." Who knew! The nickname derived from a Danelectro ad campaign linking the instrument with these guys, a gospel duo from Oklahoma.

2000

Dino Staniscia Solista Profundo Acoustic

(Canada)

Dino Staniscia’s love of building archtops was inspired by the legendary luthiers John D’Angelico and James L. D’Aquisto. Much of his approach to building and custom toolmaking is based on their traditional methods. The top of the Solista Profundo is hand-carved from solid spruce, and the back and sides are laminated maple. Though Dino built several solid body basses and many archtop guitars, this is the only archtop bass he ever built—and the only purely acoustic bass guitar in my collection.



Soloista Profondo
Fatta a mano di P.
Rino Stanisci

The adjustable bridge is patterned after D’Aquisto’s Accutone ebony bridge, though it’s made of figured maple.

As you're about to discover, I have a weakness for sparkly and avant-garde guitars from Italy in the 1960s. I'm wowed by the sheer aesthetic detail that designers of the era put into their instruments; you can see such beautiful embellishments in the work of Eko, Vox, Crucianelli and Meazzi, and most especially the wild and wonderful Wandrès. One could say that it was a natural carryover from the traditional art of accordion making into the rock 'n' roll age, but there was also a real creative spark happening across that country in the post-war years, not just with cars, clothes, and the decorative arts, but with musical instruments, too.

1960s

Eko 1150

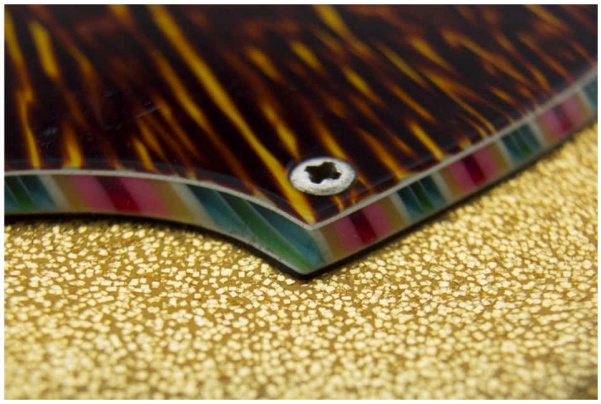
GOLD SPARKLE

(Italy)

The Eko brand, as we know it from its cool guitars and basses of the 1960s, was formed in 1959 by a certain Oliviero Pigini in Italy. They were one of Europe’s largest exporters of musical instruments up through the 1970s.

EKO

VOLUME



This stunning bass has a nice round tone, but it’s the extravagant details that make it one of the very favorites of my collection. Look at the pickguard alone! With fewer than three hundred made, the 1150 model was discontinued in 1964 and replaced by the 995 (which is the same model my pal Les Claypool of Primus plays).

1960s

Eko 1100/MB/2

GOLD SPARKLE

(Italy)

This Eko 1100 (left in photo here) is another stunner, a marvelous combination of sparkle finish and tortoiseshell pickguard, pearloid tuners, and my very favorite feature, gold brocade binding.

ALL
T
B
O

1965

Crucianelli Elite

SILVER SPARKLE

(Italy)

Founded in 1888, the Crucianelli company was a pioneer in the Italian accordion industry. Spurred on by what Pigini had achieved at Eko, Sante Crucianelli crossed over into making guitars and basses in the early 1960s, competing head-to-head. As a matter of fact, the two companies were such fierce rivals that for every Eko model there was a nearly matching Crucianelli —like this Elite (right in photo below)—so when you look at them and think they share similarities, it’s not your imagination.

Eko
elite

Interview with

Les Claypool

Bassist, songwriter, member of Primus and the Claypool Lennon Delirium, fisherman, winemaker, SeaPop inventor, musical innovator, and all-round wacky guy

SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, OCTOBER 2, 2017

Les and his Pachyderm prototype

GEDDY LEE: So, let's talk about young Les Claypool.

LES CLAYPOOL: Back in the eighteenth century.

GL: Back in the eighteenth century, when you were a child. When was the first time you noticed a bass part in a song?

LC: Well, I always heard the bass but didn't know what the hell it was. I just knew there were these stringed instruments on stage, and one had six

strings and one had four. I used to belong to the DeMolay, which was like junior Masons. DeMolay would have these dances and they'd hire live bands. I was, like, thirteen. I'd see the guy playing the bass and I'd hear that frequency and I'd think, *Wow, that sounds cool*. But it wasn't so much, "Hey I want to play bass" as it was, "I don't want to play guitar," because one day this guy in junior high named Todd Huth, who'd one day be Primus's first guitar player, played "Ramblin' Man" in the cafeteria with his band, and they were playing through these little Fender Champ amps, going deedle-ee, deedle-ee! And I remember thinking, "That is the instrument I do *not* want to play," because it was just this thin, wimpy thing.

GL: So, from age thirteen you were already interested in music?

LC: Yes, but I thought I was too old because I'd always hear stories like "Ted Nugent started when he was four years old," and I figured it was too late for me. And when I got to high school I met Kirk Hammett, and he wanted me to sing for his band but I was too scared. Then this other guy, a hotshot guitarist I became good friends with, needed a bass player. And I knew another guy that was selling a bass for fifteen dollars, and I told my dad I wanted to buy that bass. He said, "All right, let's do this right." My dad was not a wealthy man, he was an auto mechanic. So he called his buddy Al from Al's Music, and Al sold us this black Memphis P-Bass copy with flatwound strings, and that was my first bass. Supposedly he gave my dad a ripping good deal on it, but I think he kind of screwed him. And I pulled weeds all summer to pay it off. This was in El Sobrante, California. But if you live there you call it Elsobranny.

GL: And now you were doing some gigs?

LC: Not yet, I didn't have an amp! But I knew I wanted the Geddy Lee tone or the Chris Squire tone—either one or both—and I remember going to see you play *Hemispheres* at the Cow Palace. We drank three Löwenbräus in the parking lot, threw up, and then went inside, and before you came out your gear was sitting there on the stage and my pal was like, "That's just like my bass!" He was pointing at your black Rickenbacker, and I was so envious, 'cause I didn't have a fucking dime.

GL: Did you ever buy a Ricky?

LC: I saved and I saved, and when I finally had the money I went to Leo's music in Oakland and the guy there said, "You don't want a Rickenbacker. Those things are overrated. You want this." And he talked

me into buying an Ibanez Musician EQ, the fancy Ibanez with the mahogany body. And Sting was playing one of those, so I bought it!

GL: And you never bought a Ricky?

LC: Actually, I got one from a friend of yours, by the name of Alex Lifeson. He gave it to me in a drunken stupor. Do you remember that thing?

GL: Oh, right. . . . Yeah!

LC: Obviously you guys were into belt buckles, because it looks like a fucking beaver was chewing on the back of it. I have another Ricky that I bought. A Burgundy one that I stumbled on in a store, with John Entwistle's autograph on the pickguard. They wanted fifteen hundred bucks for it, and I was like, "Well, I love Entwistle, but I really just want the bass," so they gave me a different pickguard, and he died a week later! But anyway, the Ibanez was great because I was starting to thump and pluck a lot more, whereas the Rickys are not so good for that.

GL: Do you still have the Ibanez?

LC: I sold it to a friend of mine. My hero at the time was Stanley Clarke, and the inside album cover of *I Wanna Play for You* his front porch is covered with basses, including a couple of Carl Thompsons. So, one day I go into Leo's again, and I about shit myself because there's a Carl Thompson piccolo bass, a 32" short scale. It was like butter, I could play all these things I couldn't play before, and I was vibrating. They wanted six hundred dollars for it, but I only had three hundred. So I called my mom and she loaned me the other three. It's got EMG pickups now, and I put a whammy bar on. It's all maple, really a great-sounding bass. It's like a foghorn, it cuts right through. And if you look closely you can see it's autographed by a strapping young fellow. . . . Do you recognize that?

GL: I do! It says Jerry Lewis, right? [*Smiles*]

LC: At a show I came offstage and I lifted my arms, and bam! It hit the ground and the headstock shot off.

GL: Oh, is that why there's a stinger on the back?

LC: No, that's the way Carl makes his basses. So he fixed it, but I said you gotta save Geddy's autograph, so he laminated it in. The thing about Carl's basses is, each is unique unto itself. You won't get two that sound or play the same, so you alter your playing to the instrument. But everything he does is just absolutely gorgeous. Look how he attaches the neck to the body, all the laminates. . . . I have quite a few Carls, but I could never really get your tone or the Chris Squire tone. Look how far

the pickup is from the bridge.

GL: Yeah it's in the wrong place for that kind of sound.

LC: And it's a piccolo bass. So I'm making my own bass now, the Pachyderm. My buddy Dan Maloney makes them for me. I designed something that's as ergo as possible, that would get the exact tone I wanted. And I'm getting older, so I like things that are light. Feel how light that is.

GL: Oh wow. It's crazy light.

LC: It's kind of a combination of everything I like, plus some other things, like EMGs. And there's only one knob. I like one knob. This other knob is for lights.

GL: [*Laughs*] That's great!

MESA
FURMAN

LC: This is the old Van Halen kill-switch. And it’s a little slender in the hips. I did the shaping on it myself. It leans forward a little more, kind of like a Jazz Bass. It sits better on your lap. This natural wood one right here is the actual prototype.

GL: So, to rewind. . . . You went from the Ibanez to the piccolo bass. How long was this your main bass?

LC: Many years. You can see it’s got a lot of sweat and miles and wear. Meanwhile, the one I’ve got over here is kind of famous—the Rainbow Bass. The “Jerry Was a Race Car Driver,” “My Name Is Mud” bass; it’s the iconic bass for me. Whenever I put it on, everybody goes, “Ahhh!” But I’ve retired it because I worry about it on the road. Carl made it for me. I got to meet Carl after we became a little popular, and I asked him to build me a six-string bass. And then halfway through I said, “It’d really be cool if it was fretless.” I have no idea why I said that! So he made it fretless, but you can see it still has the lines. At the time, I just wanted more of a challenge, a totally different tonality, which I kind of kick myself for sometimes, because playing this thing is like rasslin’ an alligator. But I was also a big Tony Levin fan. That’s why I was doing the tapping. I’m just emulating Tony Levin because I can’t play the [Chapman] Stick.

GL: It scares me, that bass. I feel lost on it.

LC: But it also makes you play sparser stuff. That’s the Tony Levin thing, like kaboom! Just drop a couple notes on ya. You can’t do all that in-between shit, you’ll wear yourself out.

GL: When I started listening to you live, I was really impressed by the way you blended percussive elements into your bass playing.

LC: Well, because Ler [Larry LaLonde] isn’t a Van Halen, in-your-face guitar player. Because he lays out these huge textures and whatnot, my approach was always to throw a rhythm guitar part over the top of it. And we were so much into Crimson and Tony Levin, and guys like you and Chris Squire, and Larry Graham and Stanley Clarke . . . if you think of all those guys you sort of have me. [*Laughs*] With a little Johnny Cash in there.

GL: But all those influences are what create an individual. You boil them

down into your own style. It's your stew. So, you told me that you and Ler used to go out on guitar safaris, where you'd hit all the pawnshops. Is that how you turned onto Eko?

LC: No, the Eko bass came from Subway Guitars in Berkeley. Fat Dog there had all these parts for Ekos, and built it for me. But I really wanted a Höfner! I checked one out, and it was nice but not near as nice tonality-wise as that Eko. Those things sound incredible. Really punchy. These have F-holes and a bigger cavity so you get more thump. I love hollow-body basses because they give you the attack that I really like. I bought another one a couple of years ago as a spare to take out with Delirium with Sean Lennon. We play "Astronomy Domine" with that. [Plays and sings] "Lime and limpid green / A second scene. . . ." Out of tune! But Sean, he can actually sing. He's an incredible guitarist, too, which people don't realize. He's in that shadow of being the son of . . . fricken' Mozart or someone.

GL: Is there anybody you listen to who really makes you want to—

LC: Practice?

GL: [*Laughs*] Yeah!

LC: When I listen to music, the bass just happens to be a crayon I pull out of the box. I listen to Django, stuff like that, but as far as bass players, I saw Esperanza Spalding play a little while ago and she's just scary. One of my favorite guys died over ten years ago—Mark Sandman, the bass player for Morphine. He played slide on some weird Framus thing with only two strings tuned in unison. Technically the stuff he did wasn't this complex craziness, but sultry and amazing. Then in his early forties he died onstage of a heart attack at some festival in Italy.

GL: Now, Primus is your main deal and you work with Delirium, but I remember you played with Tom Waits for a bit. You've always played with a lot of different players.

LC: I'm a musical whore, you see.

GL: I would say "musically curious"! Does it change the way you play when you play with a guy like Tom Waits, or when you're playing with Sean?

LC: It's a conversation. So depending on who you're talking to and their perspective, what's discussed and the candor of it is what makes it unique. Tom is very abstract. He's like, "Okay, I want this one to sound like a wheelbarrow rolling down a hill." And you're like, "All ri-i-ght . . ." and you try to interpret it. And Danny Carey from Tool and

Adrian Belew, man, they love to play in these odd time signatures. I feel like I'm pretty good at that shit, but they had me spinning. Or playing with Stewart Copeland. A lot of times I'm the guy driving the ship, but when you play with Stewart, he's driving the ship!

GL: Can you pull out the . . . I don't know what you call it. . . .

LC: I named it the Whamola! It's got one string, one pickup, and then there's a roller. When you run it through a bunch of effects it's pretty amazing. Years ago I was playing in Burlington, Vermont, and after the show these guys knock on the bus and hand me something very similar to this. They found it in Germany or something. And I go, "Well, all right, what the hell am I going to do with it?" And I started fiddling around with, banging on it with a drumstick. Then I wrote a song on it called "Whammo," which has since gone on to be the *South Park* song. This one's a prototype of the ones we're gonna start making.

Les and me recording our new album, *Four Big Strings, Four Big Nostrils*

The Whamola

GL: When you grab its neck, I can see that you play upright. Your body language goes immediately to that. Did you ever play upright regularly?

LC: I have my original upright over there in the corner, an old Kay that I bought from a high school teacher back in the day. I played in the jazz band, but I was never like Ari Munker—he was the hotshot guy in my school. I was just making weird noises. I hacked my way through it. But I'm like—I have a friend who is an amazing sax player, and his whole thing is "Show no fear." Just let shit come out.

GL: That's good advice!

LC: Do you want a smack on this thing?

GL: I wouldn't know what to do with it! [*Dives in anyway*]

LC: Oh, now you gotta show me how to play "YYZ."

GL: [*Laughs*] Okay. On what bass?

LC: Grab whatever you want!

GL: Wait, I turned the lights on by mistake. [*Laughs*] I thought I was turning it up! Okay, now. What do you wanna know, young feller?

1960

Fenton-Weill Deluxe

BURGUNDY

(United Kingdom)

To me, this chunky monkey has a kind of post-war London vibe, handmade and homemade, with unusual appointments like the red switch, and the red dot markers on a sycamore fingerboard. According to Henry Weill, his guitars were made in small batches, between two to six in a batch, with about three hundred of these basses manufactured in total (there was also a six-string counterpart Deluxe).

This bass featured two single-coil Weill pickups.

FENTON-WEILL

Henry Weill emigrated from Germany to the UK in the late 1930s. After World War II, he started making electric guitars, partnering briefly with Jim Burns at the end of the 1950s, and, as of 1960, designing amps and instruments on his own under the name Fenton Weill. (He'd named one Burns Weill guitar the "Fenton" in the hope that people would associate it with Fender.)

1961

Gretsch Bikini 6024

BLACK

(United States)

Gretsch's first bass, the Bikini, was the idea of a New York guitarist named Charles Savona. With its piano-hinged body and aluminum receiver tracks, it came in guitar, bass, and guitar-bass doubleneck models, all modular—according to the catalog, "the butterfly back can be used interchangeably with either guitar or bass shafts"—and collapsible; you can fold this baby into a box the size of an oboe case. Nice idea, but it was a production nightmare and no more than about fifty were made. Oh, and before I forget: it has a stinger!

1968

Gretsch 6073

WALNUT

(United States)

The Gretsch Musical Instrument Company started making acoustic and percussion instruments in 1883, and their first electric guitar in 1939. Their famous Chet Atkins Roundup line is one of my faves, but of all musical entities, it was the Monkees who gave Gretsch its pop music recognition. Mike Nesmith had played Gretsch guitars for years, while bandmate Peter Tork played a 6073 bass, and the company also made a couple of Jet Firebird basses for the band in the late 1960s.

The Monkees, monkeying around *(Michael Ochs/Getty Images)*

GRETSCH

The Space Control bridge, named for its ability to adjust the space between each string (not planets), was introduced in 1967, and was one of the first bridges Gretsch built in-house.

Circa 1968

Gretsch Jet Firebird

RED

(United States)

This is a little guy—with a surprisingly big sound. It’s a short scale bass that we believe was built circa 1968, and it’s nearly identical to one of the Jet Firebird basses that were made for the Monkees in 1966 or later. Other than in the hands of Davy Jones and Peter Tork, I’ve never seen another—until this one. In fact, it’s not a model that was ever officially produced by Gretsch—making any of these instruments custom orders only. It’s got good bottom end and a little snap on the top, in no small part due to the Super’Tron pickup.

Davy Jones with his Jet Firebird in Vancouver, 1969.

GRETSCH

I have never seen this tailpiece on any other Gretsch. Skully believes that it’s a custom modification, due to the bridge being set so far back. It is like the tailpiece on the 6073, but it has no pierced G and has been shortened and modified to fit.

“Did I mention I love Sparkle finishes?”

Back row: ’59 Goya De Luxe Red

Middle row, left to right: ’60s Batman Red and ’60s Goya Standard Gold

Front row: ’61 Hagstrom De Luxe Bass Blue, ’62 Batman Bass Green, and ’62 De Luxe Bass Red

I guess I should have been an accordion player, because I seem to like all these basses that share the same aesthetics: sparkle finishes, pearloid, and even push buttons, tone wheels, and grills.

In 1925, Albin Hagstrom, like some of his Italian counterparts, began as a manufacturer of accordions, and expanded his company into guitars and basses in 1958. Hagstroms were sold in America under the brand name “Goya,” because the company believed it would be easier to pronounce (and in honor of Francisco Goya, who often featured guitars in his paintings).

1961

Hagstrom De Luxe

BLUE SPARKLE

(Sweden)

The first Hagstrom bass model ever produced. I can’t tell you how much I love the look of these. Really cool *and* fun to play, but truthfully, the acrylic fretboard makes the basses feel a bit toylike in your hands, whereas the guitars feel comfortable and natural. The body and neck were made of birch, with a plywood top and bottom, and covered in pearloid celluloid with a plastic binding. But, oh! those sparkles.

1962

Hagstrom De Luxe Ä “Batman”

GREEN SPARKLE

(Sweden)

The most legendary of these early Hagstrom sparkle instruments is, of course, the Batman—named after its headstock shape (though some call it the “Duckfoot”). This extremely rare set-neck bass was made in 1962 and 1963, and was the only Hagstrom model designed by Karl Erik Hagstrom Sr. himself.

This one differs from the De Luxe models of the period in that it has a black acrylic fingerboard.

A COLLECTOR'S TALE

This Batman was built in Älvdalen, Sweden, on November 19, 1962: in the production log it's listed as "Blue Sparkle Glitter." But wait a second—isn't it green? When asked about this color conundrum, Karl Erik Hagstrom Jr. stated that #519365 was blue from the beginning, but had been changed to green by Swedish guitar restorer Ola Rosenqvist. But Rosenqvist categorically denies ever having done such a thing. . . . Meanwhile, a highly respected Hagstrom collector says he knows it was green from the start. How does he know, you may ask? Well, apparently the person who kept the production logs was severely color blind. I'm not kidding! (A fellow named Mikael Jansson, author of *Superswede: Hagstrom Guitars 50 Years*, claims to have seen another Green Sparkle bass go for sale, in 2008.) Finally, our Swedish dealer, Janne Godman at Hagstrom Vintage Guitars, examined the bass closely and

declared that it’s clearly never been tampered with, and is all-original. In fact, due to the fragility and uniqueness of the binding, it would be all but impossible to change the top covering in an unnoticeable way. Bass case closed!

1962

Hagstrom De Luxe

RED SPARKLE

(Sweden)

What an array of push buttons! Along with selections for each pickup, it has Solo (louder), Accompaniment (not louder), and the very useful Off (off).

1964

Hagstrom H-IB

BLUE

(Sweden)

I love the color of this supercool bass that comes from a batch of five hundred made in Sweden in 1964. It has a nice, thin neck and a lively sound, and a good variety of options on the zippy-looking “Futurama” control panel.

1973

Hagstrom H-IB

RED

(Sweden)

These H-I Bs were made expressly for the Canadian distributor who wanted an instrument to compete against other economy basses of the time. Almost all of them were sent to Canada, but some ended up elsewhere. The pickup is from the semiacoustic Concord bass. Roughly two hundred were made with this pickup, and they were assembled from parts primarily from the 1960s.

Late 1960s

Hagstrom H-8 Eight String

CHERRY RED

(Sweden)

The Only 8 String Bass
Played by
THE BLUES PROJECT
JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE
ERIC BURDON & THE ANIMALS
THE BOYS FROM NEW YORK CITY
A fantastic new sound! Fuller, richer, more versatile. Really gives the bass player a chance to take-off and show his stuff. Biggest boost in years for group and solo performance. Try one at your dealer.
hagstrom
GUITARS
UNICORD, INCORPORATED 75 FROST STREET, WESTBURY, NEW YORK, 11590

I was a big fan of Jimi Hendrix, and because Noel Redding played a Hagstrom eight-string, it stuck in my mind. One came into my possession many years ago, but I never found a use for it, so I traded it away. Now I've reacquired one, and I find its harmonic range intriguing. Other players of this

model have included Mike Rutherford of Genesis, Ian “Lemmy” Kilmister of Motörhead, and Andy Kulberg of the Blues Project.

1968

Harmony H-22 and H-27

SUNBURST

(United States)

Think of the beginning of “I’m a Man” by the Spencer Davis Group. Remember that insistent two-note pattern grooving with the drums? That was my first exposure to the H-22, in the hands of Muff Winwood, and every time I pick it up, I can’t help but play those notes. This is a good bass, especially considering it was a budget instrument. The great Ronnie Lane of the Small Faces apparently favored this model over his more expensive H-27 (though he played both).

The always dapper Ronnie Lane customized his H-22 by adding a cool black pickguard *(Michael Ochs Archives/Gettyimages)*

Left: What a pickguard on this H-22, like a Star Trek chevron!

The H-22 on the left has one good-sounding, deco-looking DeArmond gold foil pickup. The H-27 on the right features DeArmonds with individual pole pieces.

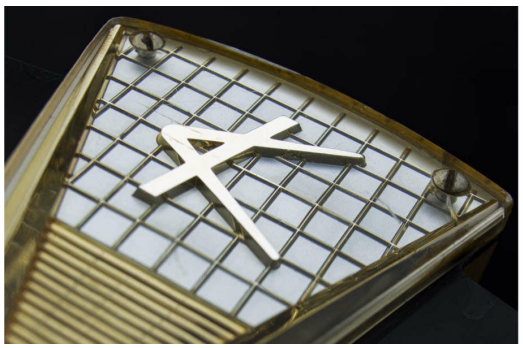
1960

Kay Jazz Special

NATURAL BLONDE

(United States)

This top-of-the-line Jazz Special, in gleaming Natural Blonde, with its big baseball bat set-neck, single-coil pickup, and deep tone, sports Kay's distinctive gold *K* "Kelvinator" headstock and abstract-art pickguard. Although players like Jeff Tweedy and Sheryl Crow are Kay players, I've seen this model only in the hands of Paul McCartney.



MY KIND OF TOWN

Kay is a venerable company founded in Chicago in 1931, which by the 1950s had become one of America's biggest guitar manufacturers. It earned a reputation for high-quality archtops and top-selling upright basses. When Fender came along in 1951 with the Precision, Kay took up the challenge and built a very different kind of electric bass: the K-162 (see here to have a look at Jeff Tweedy's). It had a thinline hollow body, and introduced the concept of the 30 short scale. Used by Howlin' Wolf's bassist, Andrew "Blueblood" McMahon, it became known as the "Howlin' Wolf" bass.

Andrew “Blueblood” McMann rockin’ his Kay, with Howlin’ Wolf at Silvio’s, Chicago, 1964 *(Raeburn Flerlage)*

Circa 1965

Magnatone X-10 Hurricane

BLACK SPARKLE

(United States)

In the 1930s, Magnatone began building Hawaiian steel guitars and amplifiers, and by the 1950s had worked with the illustrious Paul Bigsby and Paul Barth (ex-Rickenbacker). Barth was responsible for the design of this Hurricane bass, and a nice job he did, too. Its contoured body and black sparkle finish is in great condition (another sparkly bass, *yesss!*). It’s comfortable to play and makes a good plump noise with loads of sustain. This was Barth’s second go-round with Magnatone, and his Hurricane was part of a whole new Starstream series, which included other tempestuously named instruments, such as the Typhoon, the Tornado . . . and the *Zephyr*?

The retractable mute is operated by the wheel on the treble side.

1960s

Meazzi Hollywood Acoustic Prinz

REDBURST

(Italy)

Meazzi started out in Milan, making springs and spare parts for gramophones and clocks, becoming one of the largest international distributors of Italian musical instruments. By the 1950s, they were making Framez brand-name guitars in Sicily, the “Land of the Luthiers.” In the mid-1960s, Meazzi also produced their own Hollywood and Jupiter lines of guitars and basses. Over the years, they worked with several other Italian guitar manufacturers, including Wandrè.

1965

Mosrite “Ventures”

RED

(United States)

Wipeout! The Surfaris, Dick Dale and His Del-Tones, the Chantays and, of course, the Ventures: these musicians created the instrumental sounds of 1950s and 1960s California. Their songs echoed throughout my childhood, and it was impossible as a young player not to attempt at least one of them—especially “Wipe Out,” which was a hit for the Surfaris, but with a cover of it in 1963, the Ventures made the California surf scene, too. Mosrite signed the Ventures to an endorsement deal for a line that ran from 1963 to 1967.

The “German carve,” which Mosrite’s founder, Semie Moseley, would likely have observed while apprenticing with Roger Rossmeisl at Rickenbacker. As a kid with my nose pressed against music store windows, I remember Mosrites looked larger than life, with their strange, curvy bodies and angular pickups. They *still* look that way to me.

1961

National Val-Pro 85

WHITE

(United States)

Nothing if not unique. National brought out the Val-Pro 85 in 1961 as one of its line of “map” guitars, named as such because they were meant to resemble a map of the US, and I reckon that after a couple of drinks they do. It was made from fiberglass, branded “Res-O-Glas” for its supposed sonic benefits. To my ears, these cool little geographic entities do sound bright and tight with their mix of magnetic and early piezo pickups built into the bridge, but it’s really the looks that grab me.

1960

Premier “Scroll” Bass

RED

(United States)

These Premier Scroll Basses were produced in New York in the late 1950s/early 1960s, with lovely attention to detail: the carved scroll, the binding, the gold hardware, and the irresistible (to me) sparkly knobs and pickguard. It’s a very deco-looking machine with a nice, warm sound.

Premier

1962

Vox Phantom IV

BLACK

(United Kingdom)

Phantom
VOX
VOX
VOX

The original owner of this bass and his band in Malaysia

Fewer than 100 of these early UK-made Vox Phantoms were built—by hand at the Jennings factory in Dartford, Kent—before production moved to Italy, making them a real find for collectors today. (A potted history of Vox is below.) I was fortunate to find this rare example in, of all places, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It came from a guitarist and collector who purchased it from the original owner (pictured above) in the 1960s after his band had broken up. The collector, not being a bassist himself, kept it at home, safe and sound all these years.

VOX

VOX IN A NUTSHELL

Vox's parent company, Jennings Musical Industries (JMI), was based in the UK, and was more of an electronics company at first, best known for its amps—which are still revered by guitarists and collectors today. It first produced low-cost budget models, but in '61 Tom Jennings decided he wanted to make more distinctive instruments, which is when the trapezoid—or "coffin-shaped"—Phantom bass appeared. (Vox's very *first* bass was the super-rare Contour, with gold-plated hardware.) As demand increased and its product range broadened, it enlisted the help of Crucianelli—and later Eko, who manufactured its higher-quality line of instruments, both solid and hollow body, in Recanati, Italy, for international distribution.

1960s

Vox Sidewinder IV

SUNBURST & BURGUNDY

(Italy)

The Sidewinder is my favorite of the Eko-produced Vox basses, not just for its obvious good looks, but also for its wide range of tone options, which include that fantastic fuzz and treble boost. Mr. Larry Graham Jr. (below) recorded perhaps the greatest ever fuzz bass part with it on Sly and the Family Stone's "Dance to the Music"; and with his typical twangy digital mastery, John Entwistle showed us how to rock the treble boost on "Happy Jack." Aside from the standard controls and pickup selector, the Sidewinder has three built-in, battery-powered electronic features: fully controllable, individual distortion, and treble/bass boost, as well as a G tuner.

(Michael Ochs Archives)

G TUNER
ON
TREBLE/BASS
ON
BOOSTER
TR-B BOOST
DISTORTION
ON
DIST.
VOL 1

1960s

Vox Apollo IV

BURGUNDY

(Italy)

This bass has been well used over the years, but it was well cared for, too. In my view, it's a great-sounding and beautifully designed instrument, with its rich wine color and deep Florentine cutaway with an extremely pointy horn. In my early days of collecting, my lovely wife, Nancy, purchased this bass for me online as a birthday gift. After it arrived, she told me the name of the person she'd gotten it from, and that name rang a bell—Paul Bryan, the bass player for Aimee Mann, who'd been the guest vocalist on Rush's song "Time Stand Still." It's a small world.

Paul Bryan, recording his Vox Apollo with Mavis Staples at the Capitol Records Studio in L.A., 2005 *(Mieke Kramer)*

VOX

VOX

1960s

Vox Astro IV

SUNBURST

(Italy)

This is Vox’s version of the violin bass. It has the same “onboard battery-operated special effects” as the Sidewinder and the Apollo.

1960s

Vox Wyman Bass

BURGUNDY

(Italy)

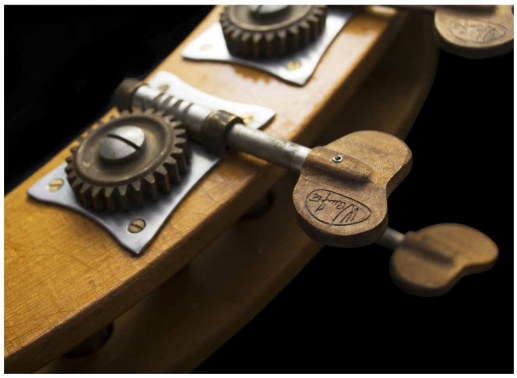
I’ve always had a thing for teardrop basses, even though they slip off your lap. This Wyman model bass was fashioned after the Mark IV series teardrop instruments. And if you want to hear what *Bill* thinks of it, see here.

Wyman Bass

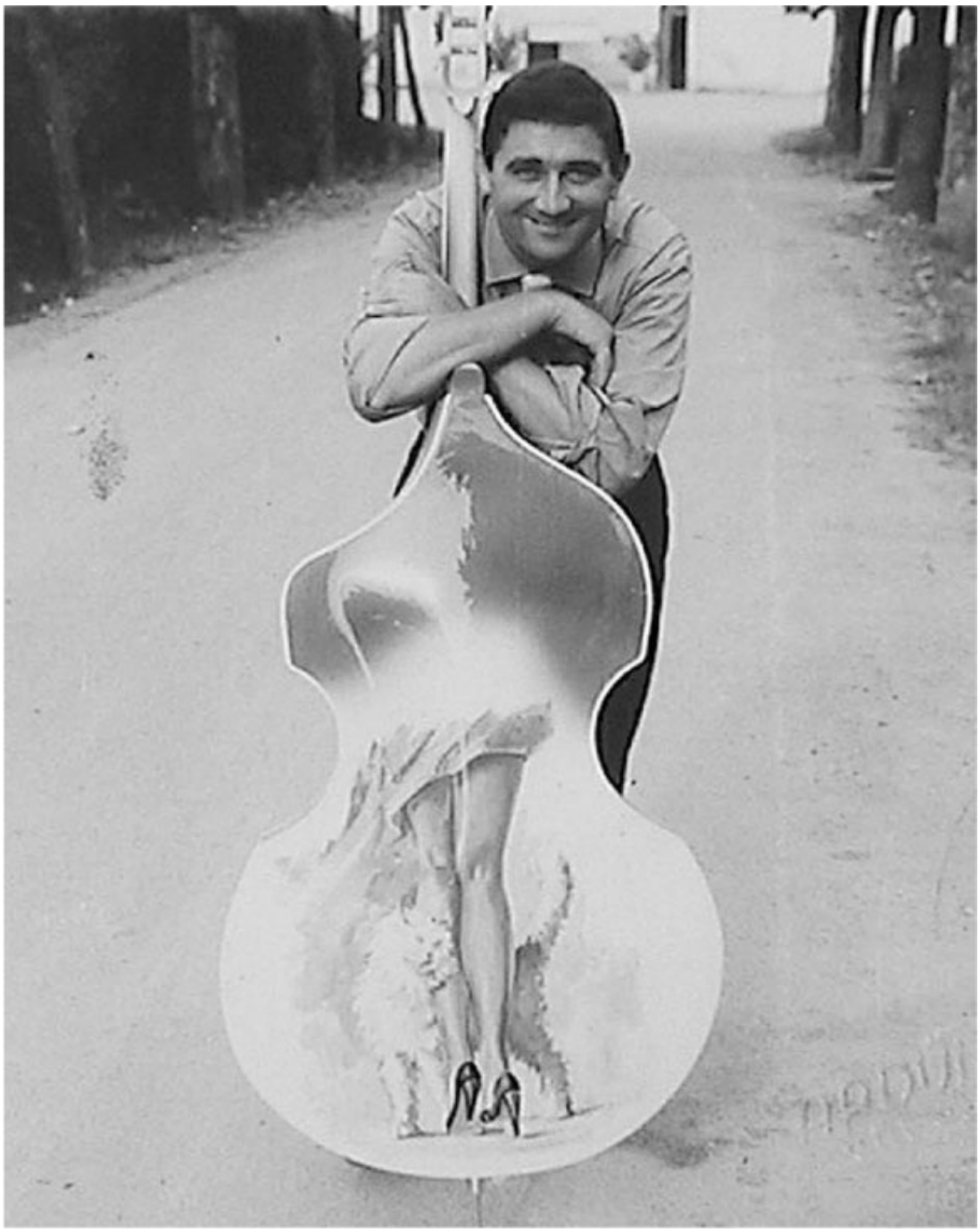
1958

Wandrè Naika Upright Bass

(Italy)



The curvaceous headstock of my ’58 Naika upright (which I can’t play very well)



Wandrè with a Naika in Cavriago *(photo courtesy of Marco Ballestri)*

WANDRÈ

ANTONIO WANDRÈ PIOLI was the son of a man who made stringed instruments and—I kid you not—human flying machines. After World War II, following in his

father’s footsteps, he applied the same restless modernism to making double basses and archtops, culminating in the design and manufacture of some of the most bizarre and imaginative electric guitars and basses you’ll find. In the documentary *Don’t Look Back*, Bob Dylan spots some Wandrè instruments in a London shop and says, “You believe that guitar? Man, they are incredible!”

Unconventional in so many ways, starting with their shapes and their aluminum necks, some with built-in loudspeakers, actual candle smoke finish, and other eccentricities, their names alone give you a sense of their wacky originality: the Spazial, the Brigitte Bardot, the Electro Blitz Bass, and Scarabeo, among others.

A dealer introduced me to the Wandrè Waid backstage in California. I had never seen an instrument so outside the box: I couldn’t even plug it in because of its unconventionally sized metric output jack. I was captivated and needed to know more about the artist who created it. If you feel the same, check out Marco Ballestri’s exhaustive *Wandrè: The Artist of the Electric Guitar*.

1959

Wandrè Rock Basso

NATURAL

(Italy)

Wandrè’s love of modern art is evidenced in many of his instruments, not

least the Rock Basso. Like the Waid, this bass could truly function without its body; even the volume control is mounted on the aluminum neck extension. Not trying to sound pretentious here, but Duchamp and the Dada movement really do come to mind when I look at this piece—indeed, according to Wandrè himself, the inspiration for the Rock Basso came to him while using *il bagno*. Hmm . . .

Annette and Francine Doisneau, daughters of Robert Doisneau—Paris, early 1960s *(Robert Doisneau/Getty Images)*

1960s

Wandrè Krundaal Waid

BLACK SPARKLE

(Italy)

The Waid has one long stretch of aluminum that runs from the neck through the bridge and beyond the tailpiece, and it is the essence of the instrument: the pickup, bridge, and tailpiece are all mounted on it. The thinline body itself is hollow and made of curved, undulating, and sparkly fiberglass, which, apart from holding the control box in place, is mainly an aesthetic creation.

I believe these fabulous and eccentric inlays mostly appeared on Wandrè’s export models.

A. DAVOLI
Kwundaal

There were many names besides Wandrè's on his instruments. Some produced electronics, some were distributors, but the only name that really counts is his.

Left to right: 1960 Spazial “Red Smoke” guitar, “Red Smoke” bass, “Blue Smoke” guitar

1960s

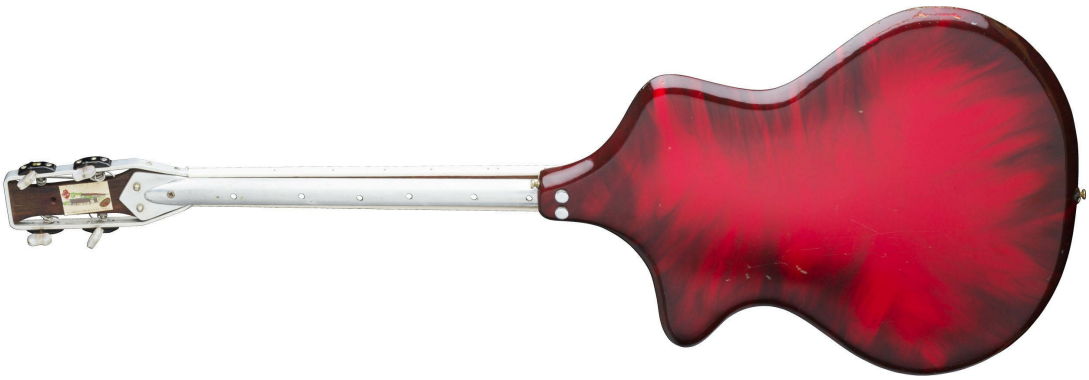
Wandrè Spazial

“RED SMOKE”

(Italy)

I love this design—not only the way Wandrè used candle smoke to create the bass’s abstract edges, but also the thinness of the fiberglass body, which speaks to his obsession with making light instruments. Wandrè called this model “Spazial” for its connection to flying and weightlessness.

I would describe these instruments as having a bluesy, jazzy tone, something from another era; echoes of Django Reinhardt. You don’t see them in action very often: Sean Lennon has one, Ace Frehley played a Bikini for a while, and the blues artist Buddy Miller—clearly a devotee—has played a Tri-lam for years. I’ve never seen a bass player use one, but they sure look good in my living room.



1968

Yamaha SB-5a
“Flying Samurai”
SUNBURST
(Japan)

The Japanese have a word, *otaku*, which basically means “madly obsessive.” It rather suits my own disposition, of course, and it’s one of the many things I love about their culture—the way they obsessively value high quality. So I shouldn’t have been surprised when I discovered how good these two boldly original vintage bass guitars are. They’re visually free-spirited, really well made, with punchy-sounding pickups to boot . . . and produced in the 1960s, a time when many Westerners like myself thought of the Japanese as industrial imitators.

Due to their swordlike shape, these headstocks became popularly known as “Samurai.” The SB-5a is nicknamed the “Flying Samurai,” and the SB-1c—in spite of its orange color and *papaya* shape—the “Flying Banana.”

1966

Yamaha SB-1c

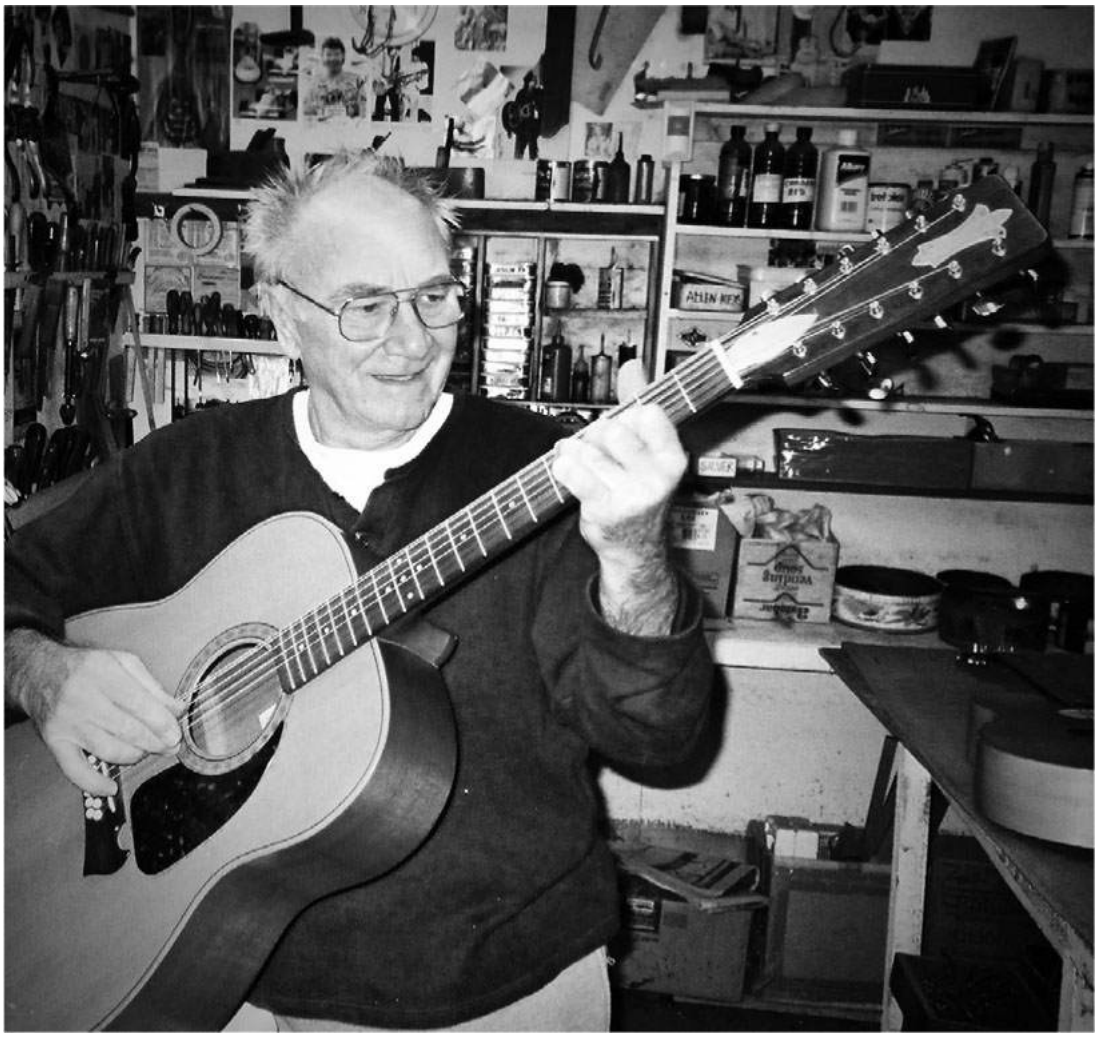
“Flying Banana”

ORANGE

(Japan)

This small-bodied, single-pickup bass has a surprisingly deep tone that punches above its weight.

HISTORY
OF
RUSH



Tony Zemaitis *(Keith Smart)*

ART WITH STRINGS:
TONY ZEMAITIS, 1935–2002

Tony Zemaitis's first guitar was a nylon-string classical that he made in 1955. He went on to make terrific six-and twelve-string acoustics, but he didn't hit the sweet spot until Tony McPhee of the Groundhogs and the Faces' Ronnie Wood started playing his earliest metal-fronted electric guitars onstage. The fronts were tooled by Danny O'Brien, a gun engraver, and the instruments caught the attention of the British rock 'n' roll aristocracy: Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Paul McCartney, Keith Richards, and Marc Bolan were soon all strutting them, too. These instruments were not just a pretty face; they stood on their own, thanks to their craftsmanship, innovation, and tonal quality.

Of course, he made basses too, both acoustic and electric, though far fewer than guitars, their most notable players being Ronnie Lane, Greg Lake, Bob Daisley, and Mike Oldfield.

It became quite a thing to have Tony Z make you an instrument. To quote Keith Smart, the chairman of the Zemaitis Guitar Owners Club, “On the back of Tony’s workshop door, he would have a list of six to twelve clients he would make instruments for during that particular year. It made no difference if you were the postman or an ex-Beatle; if you telephoned and wanted an instrument built that year, you were told, sorry, the list is full.”

1983

Zemaitis “Geisha Girl”

RED METAL TOP

(United Kingdom)

I acquired this bass from Charlie Jones, most notably associated with Goldfrapp and Page and Plant. It’s been through a few hands, but it’s been

well cared for. Tony Zemaitis really knocked it out of the park with the neck: gorgeous to play, it’s also unusual by virtue of its 32" scale length. The sound is round and clear, with great presence, not unlike a P-Bass. I used it on the R40 Tour for “Losing It.”

1992

Zemaitis “Daisley”

BLACK METAL TOP

(United Kingdom)

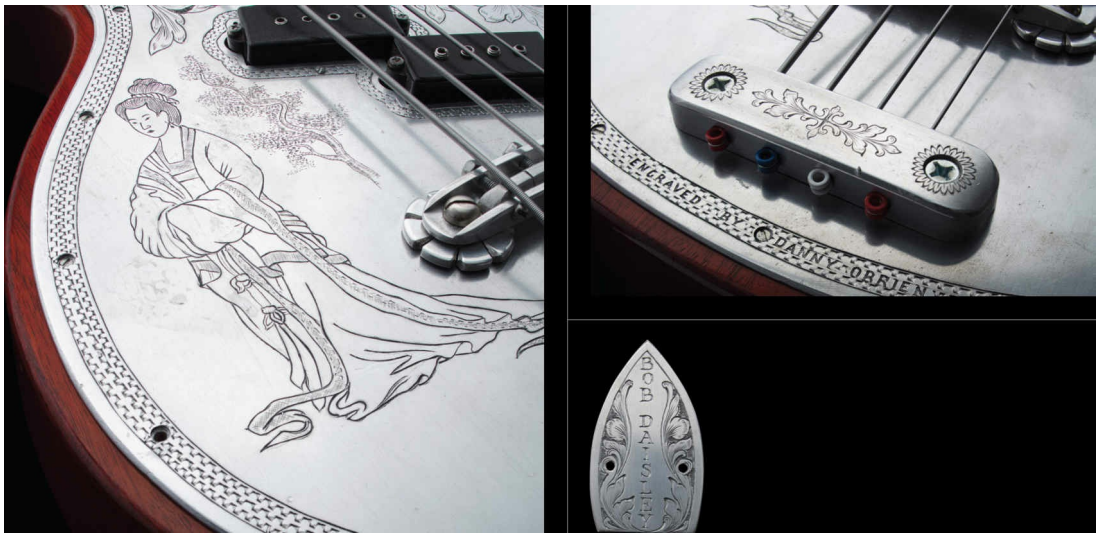
In the 1990s I was introduced to Zemaitis guitars by a friend in St. Louis who had a very impressive collection of them. They didn’t mean much to me beyond their obvious aesthetic beauty, but they did sound great. Once I started my own collection, I set out to learn more about Tony Z, and to seek out one of his rare and gorgeous basses for myself. Enter Bob Daisley. Bob was not only the current owner of Ronnie Lane’s iconic Zemaitis bass, but he also had another—one that Tony made for him in 1992—and after some good-natured back-and-forth, he kindly agreed to overcharge me for it. I took this bass on the R40 Tour to play on “Distant Early Warning.” It has a raucous and ballsy sound with a lot of low end. Thanks, Bob.

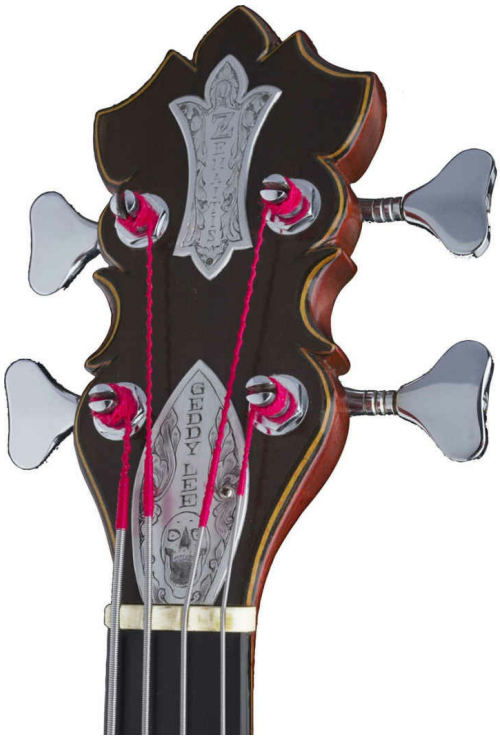
A.C. ZEMAITIS
ENGLAND * 1983

A.C. ZEMAITIS
DE LUXE
ENGLAND * 1992

“Tony and I stayed in touch for many years until he passed away in 2002. The Zemaitis slogan is ‘Art With Strings’; I’d certainly go along with that! RIP, Tony ol’ mate.”

—BOB DAISLEY





The original engraving of this top was beautiful yet simple, but me being me, I longed for one of Danny O'Brien's more elaborate designs. So Skully sent the metal top, control cover, and truss rod cover back to him, and he customized and enhanced the original work that he'd done. I couldn't be more thrilled with the result. It's a stunner. By the way, the material he uses is aircraft-grade aluminum—Duralumin, to be exact. Tony credited Eric Clapton with the idea of using these metal tops to reduce hum.

Interview with

Bob Daisley

Bassist and songwriter with Rainbow, Gary Moore, Black Sabbath, Blizzard of Oz, and innumerable others, bass collector of renown, author, and a bloody fine Australian chappie

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, OCTOBER 10, 2017

Bob with his beloved Ronnie Lane Z-Bass

GEDDY LEE: So, Bob, when was the first time you became aware of the bass in a song?

BOB DAISLEY: That's an easy one! I was in a guitar class when I was thirteen, Scouts or church, and one week in probably late '63, early '64, when instrumentals and surfing music was in vogue, the teacher brought a little band along to show the various roles of musicians in a band, and as soon as I saw and heard the bass in the flesh I thought, "That's what I want to do." I was passionate about it. It was the backbone of the music, the soul, the guts, the heartbeat, all these things combined and sensitivity as well. Not that this bloke was Paul McCartney, just the instrument

itself. I told my mum, and she was really supportive. And we went into the city and got my first bass, a Hagstrom Futurama—the red one with the plastic front. It was £35, plus a fifteen-watt Jason amp for £20, just to practice.

GL: That's great she was so supportive. My mum wasn't so supportive, but she gave in.

BD: And now she has to eat her words! You know, [Ritchie] Blackmore in Deep Purple, when they were at the top of the charts, his father said to him, "Why don't you get a proper job?" And he was serious! "Ritchie, you should have got a job on the railways like I told ya!" Pissing your life up the wall. Like John Lennon's aunt Mimi said to him: "It's all right, John, having a guitar and all that, but you'll never make a living out of it."

GL: [*Laughs*] So . . . you're in Sydney with your first bass. . . .

BD: And then I started wearing out my sister's records, sitting and learning bass lines and experimenting, like a little research program, "What is bass? What does it do?" I just found it out for myself.

GL: How long did you use the Futurama?

BD: A couple of years. I was in a high school band. We did the Beatles' "All My Loving," and people were impressed because I'd actually learnt the bass line. And "(Do the) Mashed Potatoes" and the surfing music of the time—"Pipeline" by the Chantays, "Wipe Out," and that sort of stuff. We would play at people's barbecues and get paid a couple of quid—sometimes a couple of quid between us!

GL: I know what that's like. We used to play for enough money to go to the local deli and get chips and gravy!

Bob with his EB-3 at Ridge Farms Studios in 1980 *(Fin Costello/Getty Archives)*

BD: Then later in ’64 and into ’65, the Big Beat boom, the British invasion blew me away. The Stones were my introduction to blues music, because in those days, even in America white people didn’t listen to Howlin’ Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson and John Lee Hooker and all those. I used to sit down and figure out what Bill Wyman was doing. Then I saw them live in January of ’65, and he was playing that small-bodied Framus Star Bass with the Humbug finish. I wanted one so bad, but they were so rare and so hard to find.

GL: Still almost impossible to find.

BD: I gravitated towards all the blues-influenced bands, like the Yardbirds, another good example of white boys playing blues and introducing it to other white boys. John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, Clapton played so well on the Beano album. Then in late ’66, when I first heard Cream I was in a sort of hippie shop with sandals and incense and all that—oh man! And did you ever see the bass that Jack [Bruce] used on *Disraeli Gears*?

GL: The EB-3?

BD: Actually, it was a Danelectro Longhorn. He hasn’t got the real

aggressive growl on it, but still a nice tone. I've been doing a tribute to Gary Moore album, with a lot of the Gary Moore family tree on it, and on one of the tracks I use the '59 Danelectro. It sounds great! Jack agreed to sing a song on the album, but then three months later he died.

GL: Such a big loss. . . . So, it's 1966. When did you get your first professional gig?

BD: There was a band here that had backed the Bee Gees on records, called Dennis Williams and the Delawares, and they were looking for a bass player. I'd just turned sixteen and I was apprehensive, like "Should I go for an audition? Naah! They're men." But I went and actually landed the gig. I had a Maton bass—Australian, well made, sort of between a cheapie and a very expensive guitar. Then, when I was still sixteen, I joined a garage rock band called the Throb, who'd had a huge hit with a cover of "Fortune Teller." I bought a Gibson EB-2, and we played a lot of Sonny Boy Williamson and John Lee Hooker. People say, "Oh, blues is easy, it's just twelve-bar," and it was easy and fun, but to play it properly is something else. . . .

GL: Knowing who these guys were when you jammed with another musician

that was hip to the blues—even though I was pretty crappy—it still felt like you were onto something.

BD: Oh sure. It meant you had gone to the source.

GL: So, how long before you started thinking about going overseas?

BD: Well, first I was in a sort of underground heavy rock band called Kahvas Jute. We did an album, *Wide Open*, and at that time, influenced by Jack Bruce, I had a ’69 EB-3 and a 4×12 cab with a 100-watt Marshall head. Then our singer, Clive Coulson—he sang the choruses on “Whole Lotta Love” with Jimmy Page—went to England to work for Zeppelin and the Jeff Beck Group, and when he left, he left his PA with us and said, “You’re only allowed to sell it if you use the money to come to London.”

GL: He sounds like a good man!

BD: Yeah, he was a lovely bloke. So, in ’71 the band followed him there. I’d quit, and they were trying to replace me, but after a few weeks they phoned and said, “The band doesn’t sound the same. Would you consider coming back to us over here?” I said, “Well, when?” and they said, “ASAP.” I had nothing to lose, so I sold my Marshall, got me a ticket and passport, and the night before I was supposed to leave they told me, “Oh, don’t worry. We found someone.”

GL: Oh, no!

BD: My mum and dad and sister were all gobsmacked that somebody could do that. My dad said, “Fuck them, you go over there and you do it anyway!” They kind of pushed me out the door. So I went, but when I was going down the runway to London by myself I thought, “What have I done?” You know, it wasn’t round the corner.

GL: It’s pretty gutsy, what you did. If you were older, you probably wouldn’t have done it.

BD: That’s right! And London’s a huge place. I didn’t have a clue about any of it. I didn’t know if I wanted a shit or to get a haircut, you know? But I’d been at Clive’s place only a few days when the doorbell rings, and it’s John Paul Jones. I was in awe.

GL: So, how did you get gigging?

BD: I was working in a restaurant and one day Clive came in and said, “This band’s looking for a bass player.” It was Stan Webb, who had Chicken Shack, and later Savoy Brown. I auditioned, and the day I turned twenty-two I got the gig. That was my birthday present!

GL: And had you brought the EB-3 with you?

BD: Yeah, but I knew they were out of vogue, because people would say, "So you want to be fucking Jack Bruce, do you?" Andy Fraser had one with Free, but he used it in a different way, not the Jack Bruce approach. Plus Chris White in the Zombies—you know that little bass solo in "She's Not There"? That's an EB-3, on a mellow setting. So I swapped the EB-3 for a '68 Fender Telecaster Bass. Then I was getting regular dough, and in Orange Music in Denmark Street, in the guitar area of London, hanging on the wall was a '61 Precision, £135, a little beaten up, though it was only eleven years old. I was wondering who'd owned it to have used it that much just in that time, so I didn't try to haggle. And the first gig I did with it, Stan said, "Oh, you won't be sorry." And he couldn't have been any more right.

GL: So, now you're trading up basses? Or are you starting to collect them?

BD: I only had the one at that point. But in 1975 I formed a band called Widowmaker with Ariel Bender, the guitarist from Mott the Hoople, and Hugh Lloyd-Langton from Hawkwind, and Paul Nichols, the drummer from Lindisfarne. And going on the road we needed spare guitars. So I bought a '55 Precision with the one straight-pole pickup. It had been lacquered, but apart from that it was all original.

GL: Did you like the way it sounded compared with the '61 with the split poles?

BD: Not as much, but it was a good spare. I had a split pickup put in, and I used it years later on "Gates of Babylon" with Rainbow. I plugged it into Ritchie's 200-watt Marshall guitar amp, and it sounded pretty good. But that P-Bass was the beginning of the collection. I had it in Mungo Jerry and Uriah Heep and with Ozzy. It's been a good, reliable workhorse. Then in '77 I was in Denmark Street again, and saw a '63 Höfner Beatle bass for £90, and I thought, "I always wanted one of those!" I used that on "Flying High Again" on *Diary of a Madman*.

GL: But, yeah, they're great value, those basses, so inexpensive still.

BD: They record so well. I also had the Stu Sutcliffe semiacoustic with the two black pickups.

GL: We talked on email about that white Gibson that you used for a while.

BD: Oh, that was an EB-3. I got down to Ridge Farm Studio with Ozzy and Randy Rhoads and Lee Kerslake, and I used that '61 Precision through an Acoustic stack, and on my demo tapes it sounded great, but when I got

in the studio for some reason it just didn't suit what we were doing. And so I started trying all sorts of things. I even borrowed one of John Entwistle's Alembic basses, and that didn't even sound right. . . . Next! So I hunted around for an EB-3 . . . and the only one I could find was that white one, and instead of what they call . . . the crow's beak? The chicken beak?

GL: Oh, the Varitone switch.

BD: Yeah. It had a three-position toggle switch instead. Some of them had that. So I bought it, and did that first *Blizzard of Ozz* album with it, and played it through one of Randy's Marshalls, because the EB-3s sounded great through a Marshall stack.

GL: So the collection is expanding. . . . Did you always look for basses that you could use, or did you look for some just because they were super cool?

BD: Probably a bit of both. Yeah, I helped a friend of mine, Chris Trigg, finance a vintage guitar shop in Earls Court, and I'd just pop in and have a cup of tea, and he always had temptations in there! It'd be like, "Oh, I just got a royalty check. I'll put some of it into a 'retirement fund.'" Plus they're a tax deduction, so that's when the real collecting started, in the early 1980s.

GL: And you've got your '64 Rickenbacker, right?

BD: Now, that's a really rare bass, the 4001S. Roger Waters had a dot-neck 4001S. The first year of them, they only made about a hundred. It took me fifteen years to find one. It's like McCartney's. His was a Fireglo that he painted those silver streaks and all that [on]—it's back to bare wood now, and I think he sawed a bit off one of the horns, too.

GL: I don't know why he'd do that!

BD: Come over here, Paul, and I'll give you a slap!

GL: [*Laughs*] Now, what about your Zemaitises?

BD: Well, in the early 1970s when I first saw Rod Stewart and the Faces, Ronnie was playing it through an SVT, and I thought, "Oh God, I love that sound." It had a real sort of growl to it. Zemaitises were starting to show up around London, but there was no Zemaitis shop, no factory, and he wasn't in the yellow pages. But, in about 1990, I finally got his phone number, and man, what a lovely bloke. I said, "I want one to sound like the one you made for Ronnie Lane. I love that sound, whatever that is!" He said, "Ronnie brought his own pickups—straight-pole 1950s Fender

Bass single coils." So, in 1992, when he made me my bass, the one you bought from me, I put some reissue Fender pickups in exactly like the originals, and Tony made the neck as a replica of a '62 Fiesta Red Precision that I had. I used that one a lot with Gary Moore; it's a lovely bass. But Tony didn't churn 'em out like sausages. In a year he might have made twelve or something.

GL: And even fewer basses.

BD: They made me an honorary member of the Zemaitis owners' club, and they used to send me the magazine, and one month there was an advert for Ronnie Lane's Zemaitis. I think Ronnie sold it in the late 1970s to some fuckin' pawnshop or something. He probably got a couple hundred quid for it, and then some schoolboy bought it. Then some collector bought it, and I bought it from him.

GL: I understood that it had been damaged. . . .

BD: Ronnie's old roadie Russ tells the story of how it fell off the roof of Ronnie's Land Rover in Spain, when he tipped the car! The neck was broken at the head and Tony Zemaitis had to fix it. You can hardly see the repair.

GL: What the hell was it doing on the roof? And tell me a little bit about this Burns Nu-Sonic?

BD: Well, if you go to the Burns website, there's a picture of George Harrison playing one of those exact basses on the "Rain" and "Paperback Writer" sessions. I've yet to find out if his playing actually made it to the record, because I don't know how I'd approach Paul and say, "Is that you on 'Rain'?" If Gary was alive I could phone him up and ask him to ask George. But they're both gone. Gary used to go to his place, and he said one day he took the twelve-string Ricky off the wall and played the "Hard Day's Night" chord, and George said, "No. It's like this." And Gary had the audacity to say, "Are you sure?" [*Laughs*]

GL: [*Laughs*] Gary was an amazing guitar player.

BD: I think he's underrated, as far as recognition goes. That's why I wanted to do the tribute album.

GL: Stylistically, how did you see yourself as a player?

BD: I always wanted to remain fairly melodic. Obviously I had my influences, like what Paul did, especially in the era of *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper*. And the early Jeff Beck stuff with Ronnie Wood playing bass? What he did on *Truth* and *Beck-O-La* was in some ways revolutionary.

Jack Bruce as far as being aggressive was definitely an influence.

GL: I may be a "busy" player, but like you, I've always respected the melody line. The bass role has to have a melody that stands unto itself.

BD: Yeah, it's good to be busy, but don't get in the way! Tasteful busy-ness.

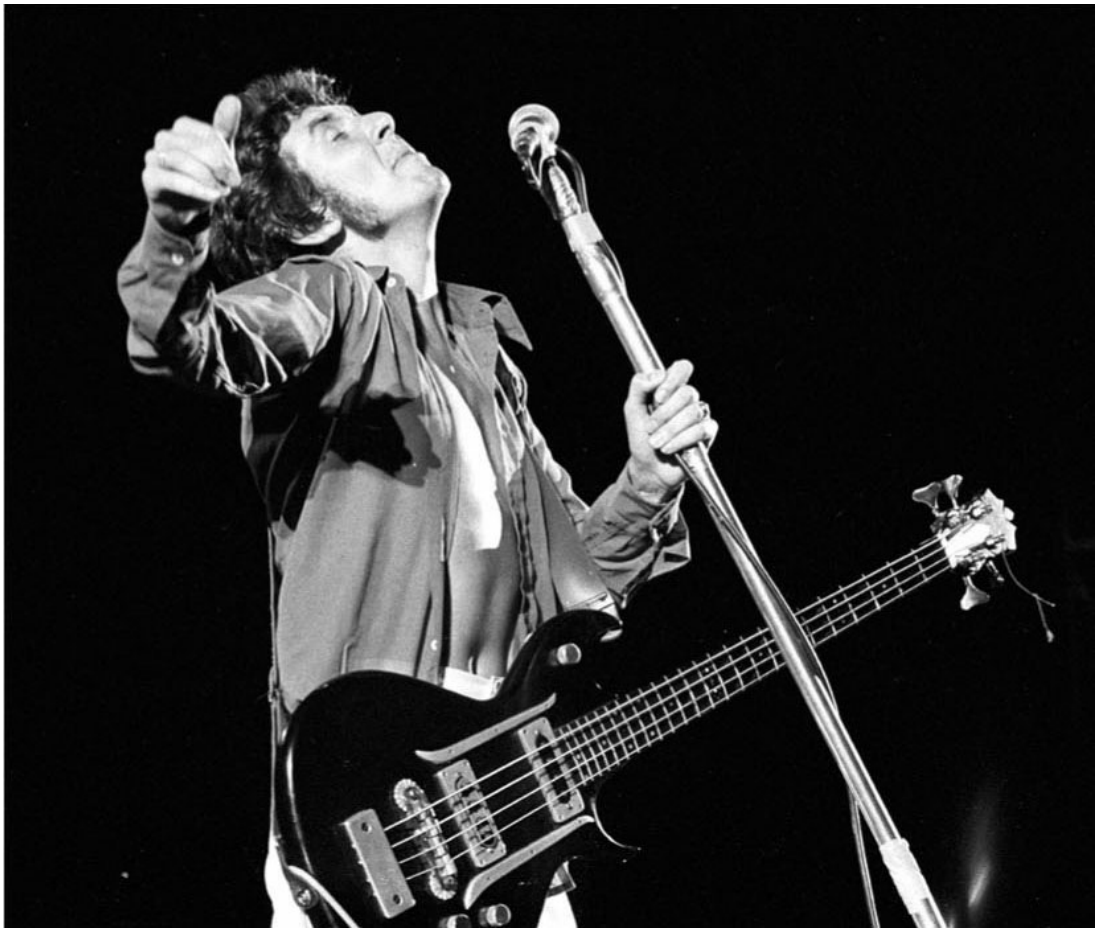
GL: Do you remember in the early days dreaming of a special bass that seemed unattainable?

BD: Yeah. There was a shop in the city called J. Stanley Johnson. I used to go in there, face pressed up against the window and looking at the new shipment of Precisions and Jazz Basses and the various sort of new custom colors coming out. It was like watching porn!

GL: [*Laughs*] Careful, I'll quote you on that. . . .

BD: That's all right. I don't mind!

The "Bill Wyman" Framus 5150 Star Bass Deluxe with the Humbug finish



Ronnie Lane strutting one of his Z-Basses at the Hollywood Bowl in 1972 *(Michael Ochs Archives)*

7

My Favorite Headaches

Stage and Recording Gear, 1968-2018

Lerxst
Marshall
dirk

My collection in May 1977, backstage for the All the World's a Stage Tour *(Fin Costello)*

In my early teens, circa 1965, I played guitar (cough!) with a garage band in Willowdale, Ontario, a brand-spanking-new yet profoundly boring suburb of Toronto. We didn't actually play in a garage, but in my friend's bedroom in his parents' apartment. We were allowed to do this because I played an acoustic guitar (with palm trees painted on either side of the bridge), and we had little to no amplification. Then came a life-changing moment: Our bass player's mother decided to no longer let him associate with us suburban degenerates. What were we to do? A vote was taken, and I was elected the new bass player.

All fine and good, but I didn't own a bass. I struck a deal with my mom to loan me thirty-five dollars for a nice, black, Japanese-made Canora I'd seen at the neighborhood music shop, in exchange for working in her variety store on Saturdays until the money was paid off. During that time, I was jamming with my schoolmate, a certain Alex Zivojinovich (who also had a "fabulous" Canora guitar), and eventually my playing improved enough to warrant

replacing it. Within a few short years I'd started to see myself, whether true or not, as a working musician. I'd even joined the union, and it was time for me to buy my first real gigging bass: the 1968 Fender Precision.

I played that P-Bass till it was worn to the bone. During that time, I became a serious acolyte of Chris Squire, and I longed for a 4001 Rickenbacker, which I was able to afford when in 1974 Rush signed its first international record deal. Time was moving quickly, and I soon found myself on the road all the time with my full complement of two basses. As a touring musician, putting a lot of miles on your instruments, you soon discover their strengths and weaknesses. Couple that with the constant honing of a musical identity, and you suddenly find yourself either modifying the instruments you have or acquiring new ones. This chapter is about just that: instruments I've used in various forms or had made for various purposes throughout my years on the road and in the studio. In a nutshell, the tools of my trade.

A useful note: the order of their appearance in this chapter is based on when I started using them in Rush, not the chronology of their manufacture.

1973

Rickenbacker 4001

JETGLO

(Stripped)

This is my first Ricky. It was black when I bought it—as you can see in this photo shot in 1976. The paint was so thin, it wore off after only a million gigs. Skip, my tech at the time, recommended we strip the rest—a decision I now regret. However, the bass has the quintessential 4001 tone that served me so well for years. I used it until 1977 as my Number One touring bass, and on every album from *Fly by Night* to *A Farewell to Kings*.

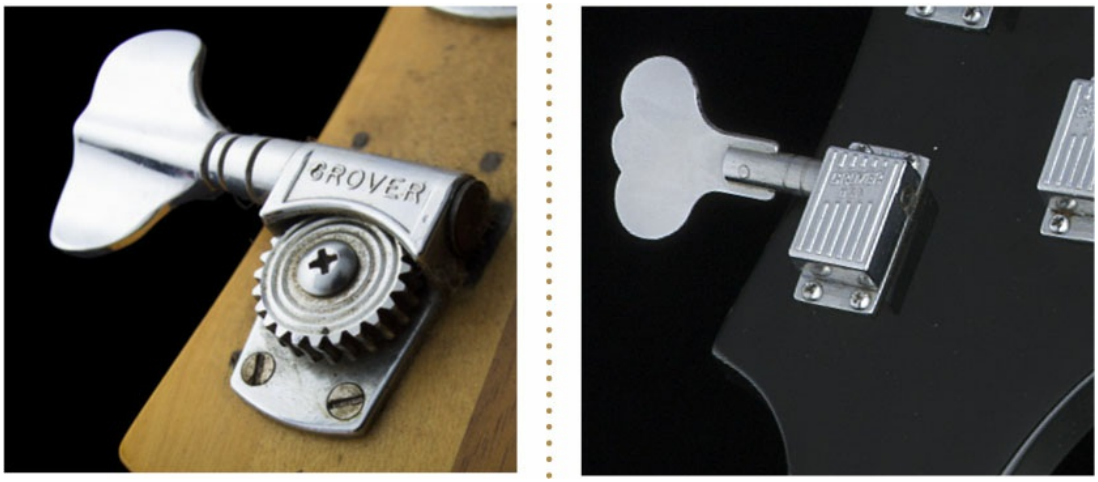
Capitol Theater, Passaic, New Jersey, December 10, 1976 *(Richard E. Aaron/Getty Images)*

The Badass was originally developed for Gibsons, which is why the first version of it is so high that it needs to be countersunk onto any other brand; Leo Quan released a Badass II specifically for Fenders. Oddly enough, I've never seen a Badass on a Gibson bass. Remember, this was the era of dense, heavy wood bodies and brass *everything*; people thought if a guitar was heavy enough to put your back out, it would sustain more.

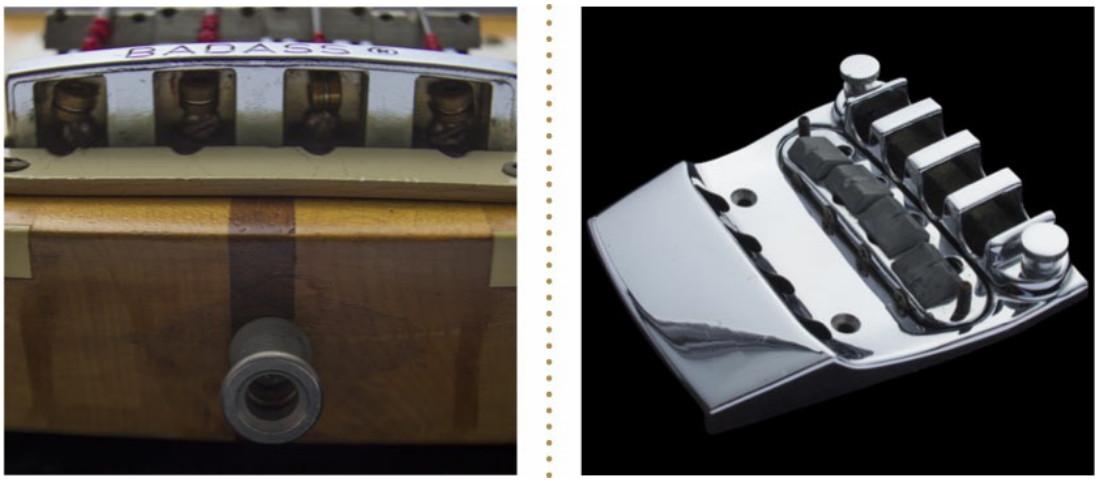
The Rick-O-Sound dual-output option was my preferred choice for both touring and recording. It enabled me to send a separate signal from each pickup to a different set of amplifiers. This allowed me to fine-tune the bottom and top, using different types of compression and EQ for each, then blend them together. It became an important aspect of the evolution of my Rickenbacker sound, which I took to another level while working with Paul Northfield, the engineer on *Permanent Waves* and *Moving Pictures*.

CH - CH - CH - CH - CHANGES

I was never super happy intonating with the standard Rickenbacker bridge, especially in the studio. Once I started experimenting, I found that the Leo Quan Badass solved the problem and gave me greater sustain, so I swapped them out on all my instruments (probably an overreaction). We also replaced the original Grover tuners with the more reliable Grover Titan model. During this period, these modifications became standard on most of my basses, including the doublenecks. One other point of note is that all my touring basses have had their original strap pins removed and kept, but replaced by more secure Straploks. Because I jump around a lot, you see.



The Grover Titan tuners *(left)* replaced the older style *(right)*



The Badass, with Straploc *(left)*, replaced the older style of bridge *(right)*

Rickenbacker
BADASS

1977

Rickenbacker 4001

JETGLO

From 1977 on, I would alternate between this and the ’73 as my main stage and recording basses, right up until 1985 (with my ’72 Jazz making the occasional appearance)—on *Hemispheres*, *Permanent Waves*, *Moving Pictures*, *Exit Stage Left*, *Signals*, and parts of *Grace Under Pressure*.

New Bingley Hall, England, September 21, 1979 *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

No picks were used in the harming of this instrument.

Top right: The mark on the pickup is from years of bashing it with my right thumb

1976

Rickenbacker 4080/12

JETGLO DOUBLENECK

In the late 1970s, as Rush was recording music of increasing complexity, we began to go beyond what we could physically reproduce onstage as a trio. So, with the advent of bass pedals, Minimoogs, and several gargantuan doubleneck guitars, we tackled the problem head-on. I called Rickenbacker for help, and its reps provided me with this 4080 bass and twelve-string guitar, which now has a good many miles on it. Built in November 1976, it was one of the earliest doubleneck bass/twelve-strings produced by RIC. It now resides at the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa.

Rickenbacker
Rickenbacker

Birmingham Odeon, England, February 12, 1978 *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

I made some modifications, adding a Badass bridge and Straplocs, replacing the RIC pickups on the guitar side with Gibson humbuckers, removing the bass bridge pickup cover, and swapping out all the tuners with different Grovers. I also added a special finish-destroying duct tape to hold the picks I was forced to use with the twelve-string.

RUSH

GROVER
GROVER
GROVER
GROVER

1979

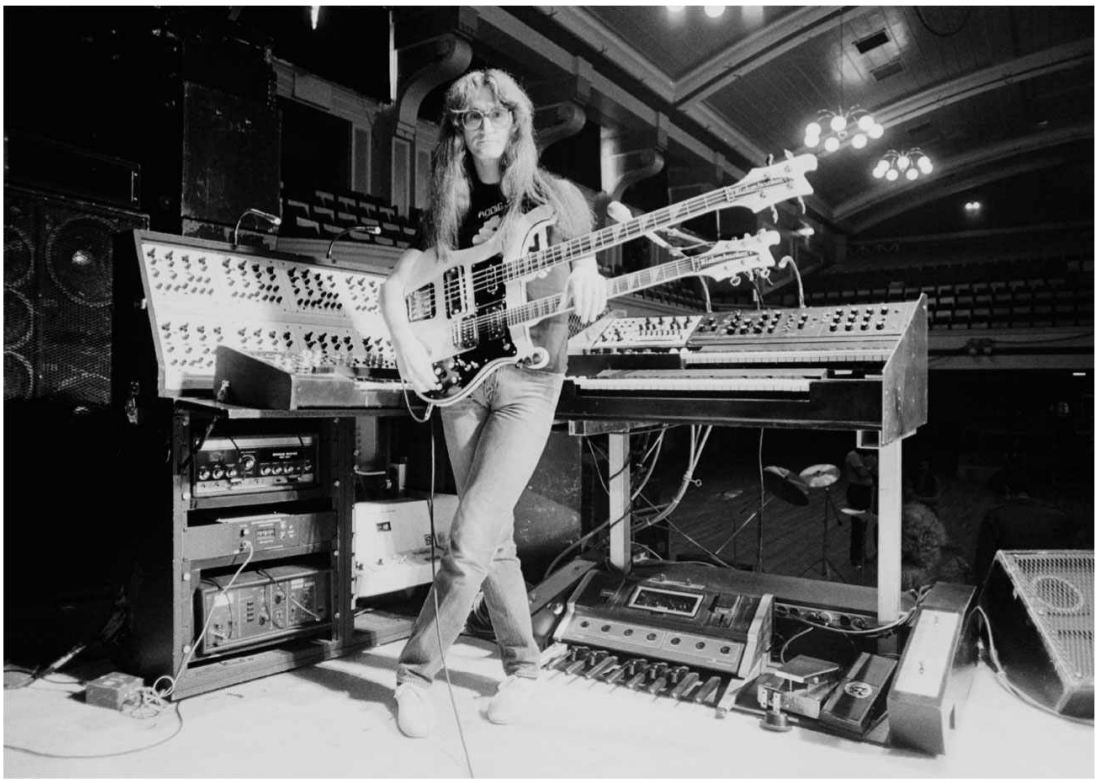
Rickenbacker 4080/6

WHITE DOUBLENECK

I bought this bass/six-string to use primarily in the song, “A Passage to

Bangkok," and at the time, I opted to play the rhythm guitar part during Alex's solo, using Moog pedals for my bass lines. Like my bass/twelve-string, this one was modified with Gibson humbuckers on the guitar side, along with a pair of coil-cut mini-switches.

These pickup modifications reflect my taste for a chunkier guitar sound during that period. In hindsight, with the advent of so much new sound-shaping technology, I could have let them be and kept this mother all-original. Many of the other mods done to the Jetglo 4080/12, such as the addition of the Badass bridge and Straplocs, were done as well; however, for some strange reason, the original tuners remain.



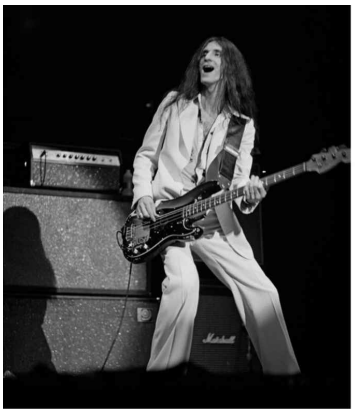
De Montfort Hall, Leicester, England, June 21, 1980 *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

1968

Fender Precision

“Space Bass”

DUNE BUGGY BLUE



Left to right: Fly by Night Tour, April 1975; All the World's a Stage Tour, 1977 *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

HOW TO ~~WRECK~~ CUSTOMIZE A BASS

This alien creature used to be a ’68 Precision, my very first proper bass, which had seen me through gigs in bars and high schools and community centers all over my native Canada. Due to its worn condition and my love affair with Rickenbacker in the mid- and late 1970s, it was then relegated to “backup” status. I was really into the big, twangy sound of my RICs at the time, and felt the P-Bass needed some livening up, so we added a Jazz pickup near the bridge to see if it would improve the top end. Then, rather than refinish it in a traditional way, I was seized by a mad desire to turn it into a teardrop shape. Skip brought it to a great luthier outside of Detroit, where they both lived, who not only took the teardrop concept to a new extreme with the pickguard, headstock, and fret inlays, but to top it all off, painted it like a California dune buggy, which shocked the hell out of me when I opened the case. It’s a loud and wild-sounding beast, perhaps a little too wild, so I used to save it for the last song of the night, “In the Mood” during the late 1970s. Hmm . . . maybe it’s time I gave it another try?

1980s

Steinberger XL2 MK I
BLACK

I started using this bass during the height of synthesizer madness in the mid-1980s. Imagine me on stage surrounded by Oberheims, Mini-Moogs, Taurus pedals, and mic stands from two directions: every time I turned from one mic to another, the headstock of my Rickenbacker would smash into one. Then someone suggested I try one of these headless things, and I was so into new sounds that I thought, *Why not try a new sound for my bass as well?* It was more practical, but I tired of it pretty soon. I used it on parts of *Grace Under Pressure* and that album's supporting tour.

STEINBERGER

Power Windows Tour, 1986 *(Paul Natkin/Getty Images)*

1985

Wal MK I

BLACK

Experiments in sound continue! When we returned to Great Britain to record at the Manor Studios in Oxford, our new producer, Peter Collins, brought in some of his own instruments, one of which was a Wal bass. It piqued my curiosity partly because Percy Jones, a bassist I hugely admired, played one in Brand X. I was struggling to get the right kind of snap out of my Ricky during the recording of “Big Money,” so I tried the Wal, strung with lighter-gauge strings than I’d normally use, and really liked the result. I asked the small British company to make me the basses you’ll see in this section, and I used them for several years, on *Power Windows*, *Hold Your Fire*, *A Show of Hands*, *Presto*, and *Roll the Bones*.

Left to right: Hold Your Fire Tour, 1987 *(Ebert Roberts/Getty Images)*; Shoreline Amphitheater, Mountain View, California, May 31, 1992 *(Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images)*

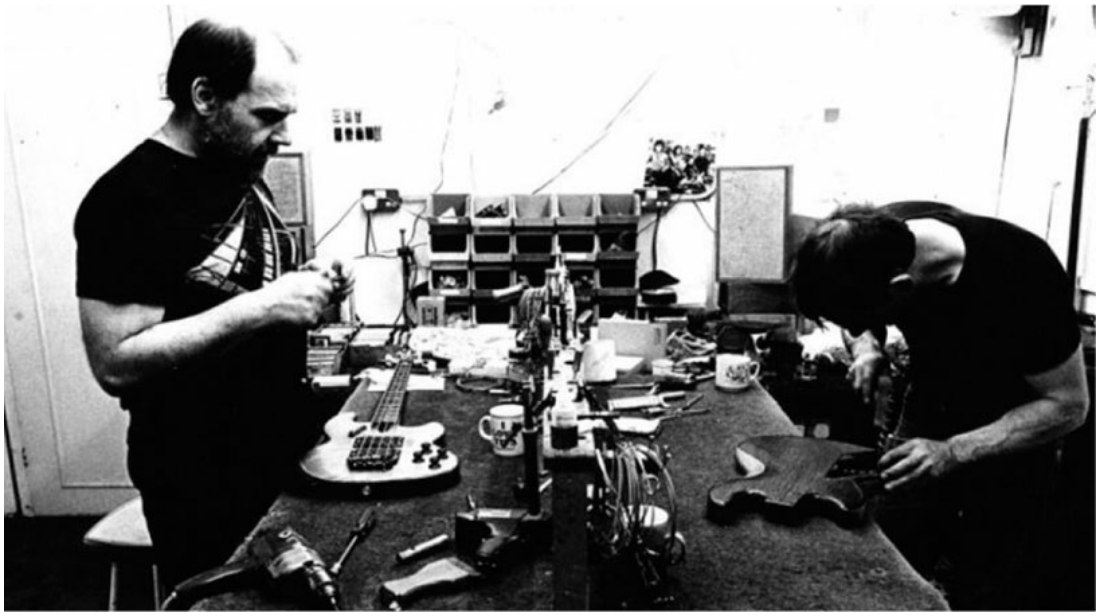
1990

Wal MK II

RED

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ELECTRIC WOOD COMPANY

It was in 1978 that Ian “Wal” Waller and Pete “the Fish” Stevens formed the Electric Wood Company. They began making super high-quality custom basses using beautifully selected pieces of wood, and housing their active circuitry in a shielded rear cavity to make them super quiet. After my producer at the time, Peter Collins, turned me on to them, I met the guys at the shop and placed a custom order. Sadly, Ian Waller passed away in 1988, but Pete carried on with his team, which included Paul Herman, who runs the company today. Other Wal players of note have included Percy Jones, Paul McCartney, and Mick Karn of Japan.



The Wal workshop *(Paul Herman)*

1986

Wal MK II Five-String

BLACK

It’s rare that I play a five-string bass, but this exquisitely crafted Wal with the low B string allowed me to ignore the Moog pedals for some ultra-low-end parts. Wal made this one for me in 1986, and I used it onstage on the Hold Your Fire Tour for “Lock and Key.”

1972

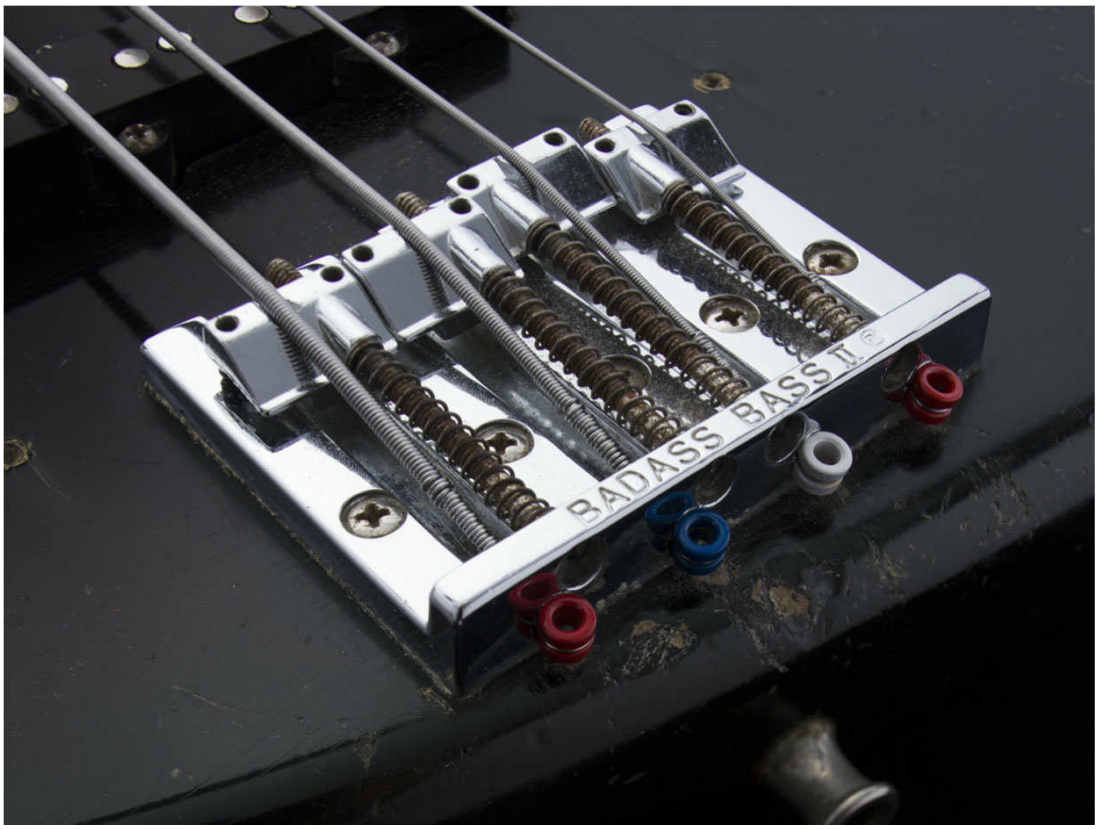
Fender Jazz Bass
BLACK

Fender JAZZ BASS

Players usually refer to their go-to instrument as their Number One, and this has been mine since 1993. (For a bit of its history and how I acquired it, see here). It made its recording debut on the *Moving Pictures* album, on "Tom Sawyer" and "Vital Signs," and more often than not it's the bass you hear on *Counterparts*, *Test for Echo*, *Vapor Trails*, *Snakes and Arrows*, *Clockwork Angels*, and all of Rush's live recordings since then.

Here's the '72 Jazz Bass in 1981, back before it became my Number One. What a baby! (The bass, not me.) *(Fin Costello/Getty Images)*

Let's talk about necks. I'd put so many miles on the original, and had it refretted so many times, that in the late 2000s I decided to retire it. (You can see it on the bass I loaned to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.) The present neck is a later custom-shop one, circa 2010, with a rubbed-oil finish that feels better and plays faster, but it retains the original '72 tuners, screws, string tree, et cetera.



Apart from the rewinding of a dying bridge pickup in 2010, the only significant change was the addition (as with all of my earlier stage basses) of the Badass bridge. As I mentioned earlier, I started using Badasses to solve an intonation problem with my Rickenbackers, and got some extra sustain in the bargain. For the longest time I believed that Badasses would add sustain to every instrument I put them on, but more recently, with such a wondrous array of Jazz Basses at my fingertips, one of the things that Skully and I have learned through close comparison is that strictly in terms of sustain, there's not that much difference between the Badass and the traditional Fender bridge.

The alchemical symbol was done by Tim “James Hogg” Harrington, who engraved all my *Clockwork Angels* pickguards.

This wear is earned, not relic’d.

1972

Fender Jazz Bass

SUNBURST

I bought these two in my never-ending search for a bass that sounds as good as my Number One. Neither did, so we asked Tom Brantley to wind some pickups for the ’72, and now it’s pretty darn close. The ’74 was fairly good from the get-go, but is even better now with a neck that I asked Fender to copy off my Number One. I’ve used both in the studio and on tour as occasional instruments and backups since the late 1990s.

1974

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK

Fender JAZZ BASS
Fender JAZZ BASS

Circa 1997

Fender Jazz Bass

TRANS RED

This is one of the first and best instruments that the Fender Custom Shop made me. I say “best” not only because it’s a gorgeous piece of craftsmanship with an alluring color on a fabulous flame-y maple top, but also because there’s something about its tone that stands out in a crowd. It’s deeper and more solid in the bottom end. I used this one on at least one song on every album and tour since I got it in the late 1990s, but it really rocks on “2112” live.

Air Canada Centre, Toronto, Canada Clock-work Angels Tour, October 14, 2012 *(Patricia Seaton)*

2006

Fender Jazz Bass Fretless

“Jaco Tribute”

SUNBURST (RELIC’D)

Jaco Pastorius with Weather Report at the Auditorium Theater in Chicago, 1981 *(Paul Natkin/Getty Images)*

ONLY JACO IS JACO

Whilst recording *Snakes and Arrows* at Allaire Studios in bucolic upstate New York, my friend and management dude Andy Curran showed me a photo of the newly released Fender Jaco Pastorius Tribute Bass. It looked so cool that I had to try one out, and asked the good folks at Fender to ship one out to me; I'm not much of a fretless player, but I couldn't resist the allure of a connection to one of the greatest bassists I've had the good fortune to see play live.

Now, when I'm in the booth recording vocals, I like a distraction to stave off the boredom of waiting between takes—sometimes it's bongos, sometimes a mandolin, but if possible, an instrument I can't play very well—to drive the producer bonkers when he finally opens up the mic. For *Snakes and Arrows*, I brought in this fretless,

and played it unplugged while our producer, Nick Raskulinecz, did his thing. Well, unbeknown to me, he started recording my noodlings through the vocal mic, and those noodlings led to that wacky little number “Malignant Narcissism.” I took the bass on the Snakes and Arrows Tour to play live on the song as well. (By the way, the title of the song comes from a line in Trey Parker and Matt Stone’s *Team America: World Police*.)

THE BEAUTIFUL BOOK OF BASS ON TOUR

As my collection began to swell, I decided to bring as many vintage basses with me on tour as I could. I wanted to feel more connected to them, rather than leave them at home stuck behind glass or in a closet (as most sensible collectors would). I was just too curious as to how they'd sound live in the context of Rush.

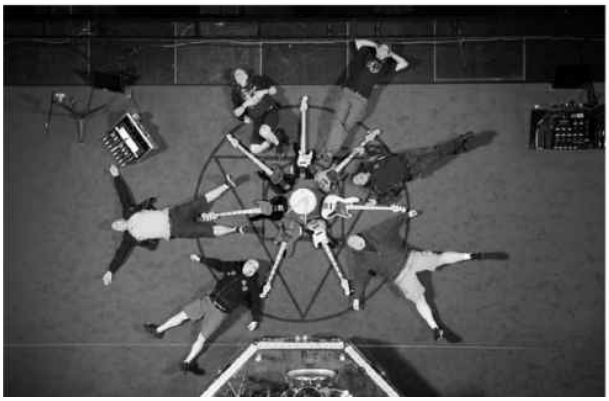
I can tell you, the challenge of playing over twenty different necks in the course of a show kept me very effin' alert every single night. There's no slacking when you go from a Fender Jazz neck to a '64 T-Bird and back to a P-Bass, but it also was a reminder, each time I grabbed a new instrument, of how excited I was to have them in my hands. That's why I wish I had gotten this bug thirty-five years ago, when there was more time ahead of me to wring the most out of them.

Okay, so now the logistics: I had major discussions with Skully and our front-of-house mixer, Brad Madix, about which bass would play optimally on which song, and where each one should be positioned in the show, taking into account what could sometimes be major tone differences. Brad explains, "The Rickenbacker 3261 semiacoustic, for example, had no high-end clarity. It didn't matter what knob I turned, it never had any point on it; we had to move the Zemaitis around in the set, too, although it is a really good-sounding bass. They all just had radically different amounts of signal coming out, so the number-one job was to get them all at the same level and let each bass have its own character."

You're always at the mercy of the acoustics of a room, not least a cavernous twenty-thousand seat arena, but the hardest thing to get right is the bass. The definition will turn to mush when competing with the top end coming off a drum kit and cymbals, plus the kerrang of the guitar. Onstage,

I’m trying to reproduce the sound of the song’s original recording, but sometimes I have to forgo some of the nuance. That was certainly true on past tours, when I mostly used a single bass all night, my ’72 Jazz, but having worked with Brad for more than fifteen years, I knew I could trust him implicitly; and with four separate and different-sounding channels of bass coming from my setup, he had the flexibility to adjust distortion, volume, and tone as each song required.

Then on the R40 Tour, with twenty-seven instruments, we added an Axe-FX Fractal unit, so that every time Skully handed me another bass we could click to an EQ’d preset digital-memory snapshot and never suffer a drop in volume. It was a tall order to make them all work, but the guys, the technology, and the basses came through for me.



Photography by Richard Sibbald, Craig Renwick, John Arrowsmith, and Randy Johnson

Photography by Richard Sibbald, Craig Renwick, John Arrowsmith, and Randy Johnson

Photography by Richard Sibbald, Craig Renwick, John Arrowsmith, and Randy Johnson

2012

Fender Jazz Bass

SURF GREEN

Fender
JAZZ BASS

This is another marvel from Jason Smith at the Custom Shop that Skully had designed and surprised me with before the Clockwork Angels Tour. It’s not merely Surf Green—one of the most elusive of vintage colors—but it sounds quite unlike my other Jazz Basses: warmer, mellower, and controlled and round in the bottom end. (It’s the only modern-era bass I have whose pickups were wound by the famed Fender pickup winder Abigail Ybarra.) It’s made appearances in a variety of songs over the last few tours, and it sounded particularly great on “The Garden.”

2012

Fender Jazz Bass

“The Ghost”

WHITE (RELIC’D)

Fender
JAZZ BASS

This is a unique bass that Skully put together for me and dubbed “the Ghost.” It was built up from a body blank he got from Mike Bump at the Fender Custom Shop, with a sunburst paint job done by Dino Staniscia, sprayed over in white and severely relic’d by both Dino and Skully to achieve its fabulous ectoplasmic effect. It has Tom Brantley pickups rewound just prior to the Time Machine Tour, and my own signature high-mass bridge. So, quite a group effort. I just love the blonde dot neck—very different for a modern-era Jazz Bass. I use it from time to time, mainly as a backup, but it sounds good and looks . . . ghostly!

2011

Fender Jazz Bass

BLACK-RED PEARL GUARD

Fender
JAZZ BASS

This was another team project led by Skully: he paired a body from a Japanese Geddy Lee Signature Jazz Bass with a neck from Mike Bump at Fender; Skully's daughter Deirdre had the idea for the red pearloid scratch guard with cool black screws; and, again, Tim Harrington did the alchemical symbol. I use this one primarily for live play and as a backup.

2018

Fender Jazz Bass
Custom Shop Special
LE STUDIO

Just before completion of this book, Skully walked in carrying two guitar cases. Alex and I opened them to find a Jazz Bass and a Telecaster made out of odd-looking yet somehow familiar pieces of wood. They were gifts from Mike Bump, who'd made them at the Fender Custom Shop.

Someone associated with Le Studio in Morin Heights, Quebec, where we recorded Permanent Waves, Moving Pictures, Signals, and more, reached out to Mike and provided him with some pre-cut slabs of wood that had been the door to one of the sound booths we used to use to isolate our amplifiers. Mike crafted the instruments from those slabs, and even managed to find two neck plates that already had serial numbers containing "2112." The memories came flooding back. We were both very touched—surprisingly emotional, actually. Oh, and he asked Stephen Stern of the Gretsch Custom Shop to turn a pair of drumsticks from the remaining wood for Neil. Thanks, boys!

JAZZ BASS
STUDIO

V211282

STUDIO
STUDIO

2016

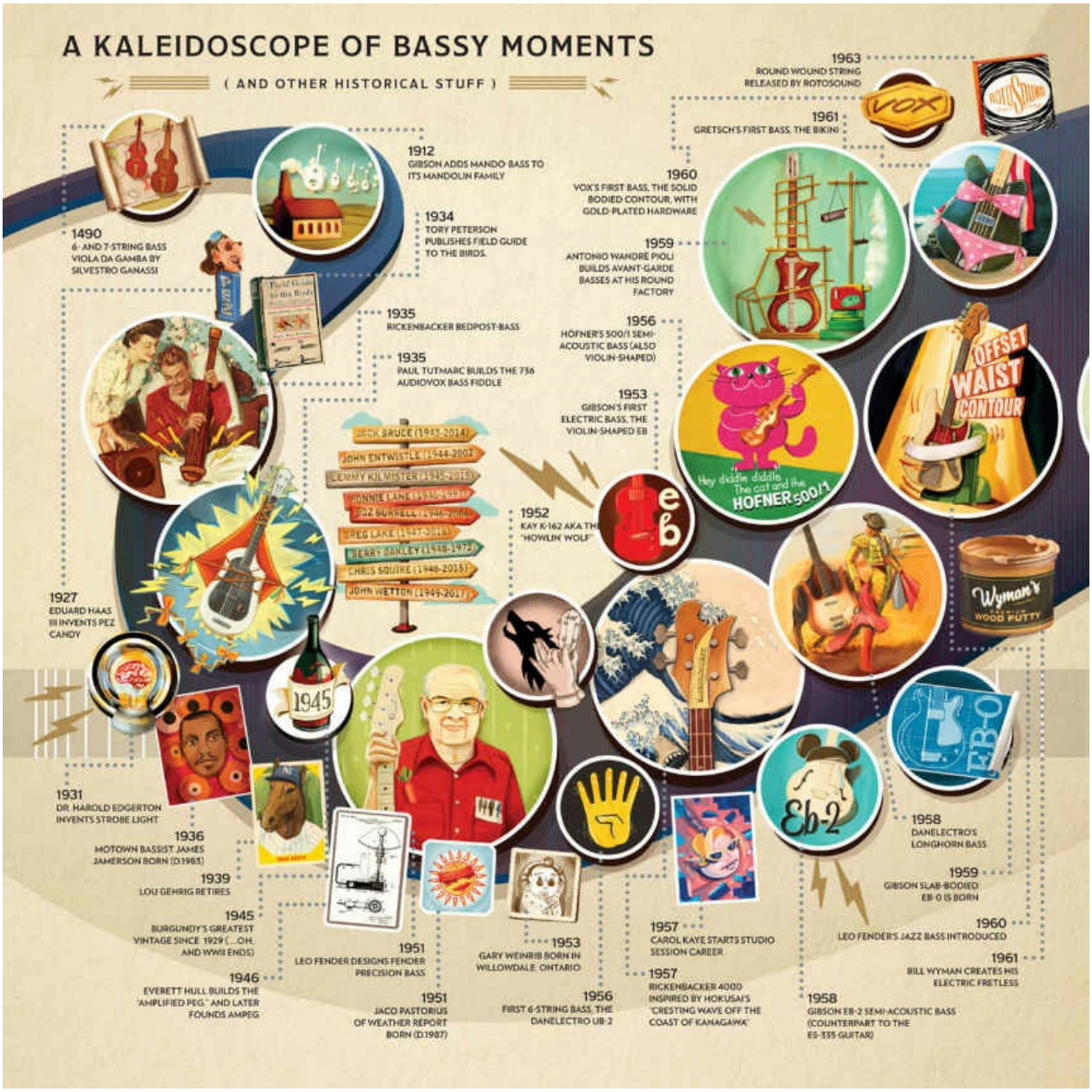
Gretsch Roundup

WALNUT STAIN

Here’s a one-of-a-kind bass, the quintessential Western instrument made at my request by master builder Stephen Stern of the Gretsch Custom Shop. I’ve always loved the ’55 Gretsch Roundup guitars, with all their cool cowboy appointments—the belt buckle tailpiece, the cow-and-cactus inlays in the pearloid block markers, the tooled and studded leather sides—and when I first started collecting vintage instruments I simply had to have one. Stephen, with the help of Ron Thorn of Thorn Custom Guitars, did an amazing job creating a bass version for me, including a single custom-made Dynasonic-style bass pickup, custom-made bridge and tailpiece . . . the full monty. It sounds great, plays beautifully, and looks so dang rodeo.

Left to right: 1956 Gretsch Chet Atkins 6121; 1955 Gretsch Roundup 6130; the Gretsch Roundup Bass; 1955 Gretsch Roundup Guitar 6130

GRETSCH


A KALEIDOSCOPE OF BASSY MOMENTS
(AND OTHER HISTORICAL STUFF)
1490
6- AND 7-STRING BASS VIOLA DA GAMBA BY SILVESTRO GANASSI
1912
GIBSON ADDS MANDO-BASS TO ITS MANDOLIN FAMILY
1934
TORY PETERSON PUBLISHES FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS.
1935
RICKENBACKER BEDPOST-BASS
1935
PAUL TUTMARC BUILDS THE 736 AUDIOVOX BASS FIDDLE
1927
EDUARD HAAS III INVENTS PEZ CANDY
1931
DR. HAROLD EDGERTON INVENTS STROBE LIGHT
1936
MOTOWN BASSIST JAMES JAMERSON BORN (D.1983)
1939
LOU GEHRIG RETIRES
1945
BURGUNDY'S GREATEST VINTAGE SINCE 1929 (...OH, AND WWII ENDS)
1946
EVERETT HULL BUILDS THE "AMPLIFIED PEG," AND LATER FOUNDS AMPEG
1951
LEO FENDER DESIGNS FENDER PRECISION BASS
1951
JACO PASTORIUS OF WEATHER REPORT BORN (D.1987)
1952
KAY K-162 AKA THE "HOWLIN' WOLF"
1953
GARY WEINRIB BORN IN WILLOWDALE, ONTARIO
1953
GIBSON'S FIRST ELECTRIC BASS, THE VIOLIN-SHAPED EB
1956
FIRST 6-STRING BASS, THE DANELECTRO UB-2
1956
HÖFNER'S 500/1 SEMI-ACOUSTIC BASS (ALSO VIOLIN-SHAPED)
1957
CAROL KAYE STARTS STUDIO SESSION CAREER
1957
RICKENBACKER 4000 INSPIRED BY HOKUSAI'S "CRESTING WAVE OFF THE COAST OF KANAGAWA"
1958
GIBSON EB-2 SEMI-ACOUSTIC BASS (COUNTERPART TO THE ES-335 GUITAR)
1958
DANELECTRO'S LONGHORN BASS
1959
GIBSON SLAB-BODIED EB-0 IS BORN
1959
ANTONIO WANDRE PIOLI BUILDS AVANT-GARDE BASSES AT HIS ROUND FACTORY
1960
LEO FENDER'S JAZZ BASS INTRODUCED
1960
VOX'S FIRST BASS, THE SOLID BODIED CONTOUR, WITH GOLD-PLATED HARDWARE
1961
BILL WYMAN CREATES HIS ELECTRIC FRETLESS
1961
GRETSCH'S FIRST BASS, THE BIKINI
1963
ROUND WOUND STRING RELEASED BY ROTOSOUND
JACK BRUCE (1943-2014)
JOHN ENTWISTLE (1944-2002)
LEMMY KILMISTER (1945-2015)
RONNIE LANE (1946-1997)
JEFF BURRELL (1946-2006)
GREG LAKE (1947-2016)
BERRY OAKLEY (1948-1972)
CHRIS SQUIRE (1948-2015)
JOHN WETTON (1949-2017)
1945
Hey diddle diddle, The cat and the HOFNER 500/1
OFFSET WAIST CONTOUR
Wyman's WOOD PUTTY
EB-0
Eb-2

1963 FIRST ACTIVE ELECTRONICS BASS, THE BURNS TR2
1963 MOSRITE "VENTURES" LINE DEBUTS, INCLUDING THE MARK X BASS
1965 CBS PURCHASES FENDER
1965 THE DOORS ENJOY SUCCESS WITHOUT A BASS PLAYER
1969 AMPEG'S DAN ARMSTRONG "SEE-THROUGH" BASS
1969 PAUL MCCARTNEY'S LEFTY 1961 HÖFNER 500/1 "CAVERN" STOLEN
1970 TIM BOGART'S CLAWHAMMER OVERDRIVE SOLO ON 'OLEO'
1970 GEEZER BUTLER RECORDS FIRST WAH-WAH BASS SOLO
1971 SPIDER FROM MARS TREVOR BOLDER SPORTS LONGEST SIDEBURNS IN ROCK HISTORY
1976 RUSH DONS MAGICAL KIMONO LOOK FOR 2112
1976 LEO FENDER'S MUSICMAN STINGRAY
1977 SID VICIOUS, WORST BASS PLAYER EVER AND F**** PROUD OF IT, JOINS SEX PISTOLS
1977 TORONTO BLUE JAYS FOUNDED
1979 PAUL SIMONON OF THE CLASH SMASHES BASS ONSTAGE. PHOTOGRAPH BY PENNIE SMITH BECOMES LONDON CALLING ALBUM COVER
1980 J.T. HARGREAVES STORE BUILDS GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS WORLD'S BIGGEST ELECTRIC BASS
TR2
"THE GYPSIES HAD NO HOMES. THE DOORS HAD NO BASS. BUT DON'T LET THAT SCARE YOU, MY FRIEND. LET THAT LIBERATE YOU!" -KISS ON THE WALL
SLAP
WAH WAH
How to Play a Bass
SUZI QUATRO
EL PESCADO
PRESSURE
BOLLOCKS
WE DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO.
1963 GIBSON THUNDERBIRD "REVERSE"
1965 FENDER BASS V
1967 JACK CASADY ACQUIRES HIS OWSLEY-MODDED GUILD STARFIRE
1967 JOHN ENTWISTLE ASSEMBLES "FRANKENSTEIN" BASS FROM FIVE SMASHED FENDERS
1968 LARRY GRAHAM KICKSTARTS FUNK WITH SLAP/POP STYLE
1969 ZZ TOP BASSIST DUSTY HILL DESCRIBES HIS TONE: "LIKE A RHINO FARTING IN A TRASH CAN"
1970 DOCK ELLIS PITCHES NO-NO ON LSD
1971 VOCALIST BOZ BURRELL JOINS KING CRIMSON, BECOMES BASSIST AFTER FRIPP TEACHES HIM HOW TO PLAY
1972 CHRIS SQUIRE'S "THE FISH" ON FRAGILE FIRST ALL-BASS COMPOSITION
1972 SUZI QUATRO, FIRST FEMALE BASSIST TO SCORE A HIT SINGLE
1973 BASSLINE FOR PINK FLOYD'S "MONEY" FIRST (AND ONLY) TOP-TEN SINGLE WRITTEN IN 7/4
1975 TONY ZEMAITIS BUILDS ACOUSTIC BASS FOR MIKE OLDFIELD
1976 BOOTSY COLLINS'S "SPACE BASS" BUILT... BY COSMIC COINCIDENCE, GEDDY LEE'S "SPACE BASS" MADE SAME YEAR, ALSO IN DETROIT
1977 FIRST 12-STRING BASS DESIGNED BY CHEAP TRICK'S TOM PETERSSON
1977 FIRST BASS WITH ALEMBIC LOGO AND EXOTIC WOODS MADE FOR JACK CASADY
1979 HEADLESS STEINBERGER BASS

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my incredibly tolerant family, for putting up with yet another of my obsessions—with its subsequent absences, physical, mental, and social.

And, of course, my team: John “Skully” McIntosh, for his curating and steadfast dedication to the instruments; Daniel Richler, who wrestled words with me for many months to help me express myself with precision; and, of course, Richard Sibbald not only for his truly stunning photography but also for his constant optimism—they all made contributions truly above and beyond any reasonable expectation. This book would not exist without their

efforts.

I'm also much indebted to . . .

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Last but most certainly not least, my partners for over forty years, Alex and Neil, whose friendship, encouragement, and creative spirit remain a touchstone in all of my endeavors.

About the Author

GEDDY LEE is a remarkably youthful bass player, born in 1953. For more than forty-two years he's been a member of the Canadian hard rock trio Rush who, after numerous self-indulgent recordings and about a bajillion concerts, were mercifully inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2013. Geddy is an Officer of the Order of Canada, holds an honorary doctorate in music from Nipissing University, and, along with his bandmates, was named "Musicians of the Millennium" by the *Harvard Lampoon*, yet he is most highly regarded for having won his fantasy baseball league four seasons in a row. He has also fathered two reasonably intelligent children and lives near a remote village in the Great White North in a home surrounded by land mines with his lovely wife, Nancy Young; two small but extremely dangerous Norwich Terriers; and far too many bass guitars.

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